

Zen Garden Massacre

the first iteration



tristan furstahl



Zen Garden Massacre, the first iteration
by Tristan Furstahl

枯山水大量虐殺最初の反復
トリストアン・ フールスタール

www.zengardenmassacre.weebly.com

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Synopsis

Zen Garden Massacre, the first iteration, is a free-form collection of interconnected stories in the vein of Murakami and Joyce that attempts to resolve the *nothingness* and *everythingness* aspects of Zen. Throughout the novella our nameless protagonist reveals glimpses of his past life while undergoing one of the most physically demanding trials ever known: the Kaihogyo, or 1000 days of running undertaken by the Marathon Monks of Kyoto, Japan. Running to exhaustion is the perfect platform to recollect these stories and assemble them into something more meaningful, something approaching the *everythingness* of Zen. Only through immense exhaustion can our hero see the *purity* of his choices.

Part travelogue, part absurdist comedy, part meditation and part mystery. Our protagonist is running, but what for and what from?

next: foreword and notes on copyright and reader incentives. Yes, you read that correctly! I've incentivized the book financially for the reader who can figure out the puzzle.

Foreword and notes on copyright and reader incentives

Zen Garden Massacre is an experiment in narrative structure, physical distribution and even incentivization. Zen is nothing and everything, though the later is rarely represented in works of fiction. Looking at Murakami, Joyce and Vonnegut, amongst others, for inspiration and splicing in first-hand elements of world travel I have set out to create a book (and potential serial) that is enjoyable from various vantage points. *Garden* and *Massacre* are typically self-explaining. Not so here.

A common writer's conceit is to try and fit everything in, diluting the core philosophies of the work itself. I have taken the opposite tact and allowed myself room for absurdism, black comedy, travel writing, and even notions of philosophy and meditation as our unnamed protagonist finishes his trials as a Tendai Marathon Monk in Kyoto, Japan. Amongst more traditional monastic endeavors, Tendai Marathon Monks will run for 1000 days over 7 years, averaging 60km per day, in an effort to reach a state of living enlightenment. As our protagonist runs, he re-lives key points in his life. While most Gyoja (trainee monks) meditate upon a mantra meant to induce mental carte blanche, the *nothingness* of Zen, our hero is more concerned with the *everythingness* of Zen. It is this sense of everything, built from personal experience and compiled with the beat of running's steady cadence that our protagonist pursues in his quest to achieve his own form of enlightenment.

The loose structure of the book is wrapped around a simple mystery with a twist ending, and I have chosen to be specifically ambiguous at points in order to challenge you, the reader. One of the (hopefully many!) charms of this novella is that it is also a carefully-planned cryptologic puzzle, one that has been incentivized for the purchasing consumer. In short, the first reader to figure out the cryptologic code and unlock the protagonist's name will win 10% of the net publishing royalties collected to that point. Other puzzles will then be revealed as subsequent chapters are added, each incentivized similarly. Skip ahead a few pages to see detailed info about the puzzle and pay out.

ZGM is licensed under a Creative Commons free distribution license which means that you may freely share my work providing you neither change the content (very important, considering the puzzle!) nor profit from it without my prior consent. There is a catch, though: if you wish to compete in the challenge you must purchase a copy of my book from my weebly webpage (www.zengardenmassacre.weebly.com) via paypal for the incredibly low price of \$1.99. And thus is the incentivization: the more people who purchase copies, the more exciting the cryptologic challenge becomes, the more money I earn to keep the happy little process going. Thus, if you like this book and want the challenge to be more meaningful, please help market it by spreading the word. I have chosen the full DIY publishing route, eschewing Amazon for a PayPal link and free webpage, so your help would be much appreciated. I feel the strength and potential of the writing are quite conducive to a successful

WOM marketing campaign and while Amazon has an excellent self-publishing platform (please check it out!), I feel that there are some limitations with it; namely DRM-related with regards to CC-licensing.

Lastly, I have chosen to write short books in serialized form for a few reasons. Namely, I can keep costs down and turnover high, but also because these books aim to be linguistically dense, and I'd like to give the reader some realistic chance at solving the puzzle! A diligent reader should be able to finish this book in around two or three hours though will spend much longer trying to figure out the puzzle if they are so inclined.

It was a pleasure writing this book, and it's something I hope to continue; more importantly, though, whether or not you paid for the book it is my honest hope that you enjoy(ed) it.

Tristan Furstahl, New York, September 2011

tristan.furstahl@gmail.com

next: Details of the Cryptologic Challenge

Details of the Cryptologic Challenge

Most books involving vague mysteries have at their core a diligent detective who reveals clues that allow the reader the same chances at solving the mystery as the detective in question. ZGM anticipates a well-read reader who, while not bored of such tropes, may be interested in something different, something with more weight, depth and real-world incentive. Popular author(s) of novels named “The Da Vinci Code” allow their in-house protagonists the chance to unravel the mystery; not me, I’m outsourcing the mystery to you, the diligent reader. Outsourcing is very hip these days, and it’s important to stay current.

Certainly the most unique aspect of this book is the cryptologic puzzle which I’ve carefully constructed from page one. Hidden throughout this work are clues, subtle or otherwise, that lead the detailed reader on a mathematical and linguistic scavenger hunt. The astute reader will eventually figure out the puzzle and in doing so will unlock the name of the protagonist.

Once you have the name (first and last), send me an email (tristan.furstahl@gmail.com) with the following info:

Subject Line: protagonist's name

Attachment: a PDF/receipt/screengrab proving purchase of the book; it should include your name.

Body: A quote or line from your favorite book.

Note that the first two elements above are of prime and equal importance; as for the body of the email, I like reading as much as writing and am basically fishing for recommendations!

Also, I have hidden another puzzle in this book but will only reveal the key when the first puzzle (protagonist’s name) is confirmed. Lastly, if the cryptologic puzzles cannot be solved, I will donate 10% of the publishing profits to programs which my readers seem most fitting.

next: Wikipedia Linking

Wikipedia Linking

I have always been a fervent reader of encyclopedias and feel that ZGM's audience is likely similar to me: curious of new things. I have thus included many links in this book to the more esoteric elements so that any interesting but unfamiliar points may be quickly researched.

*next: **Dedication**, then, on to the book!*

This book is **dedicated** to all the adventurers who feel that personal enlightenment can be achieved by experiencing as much as possible during our time on this earth; for the curious, for the risk-takers, for the makers, DIYers, doers and shakers. You are who make this world the best one we got.

And so we **begin**.

Post Trial, baby steps for carbon footprints

I'm very awake, a dragonfly-eyed masterpiece of throbbing arterial blood conformed loosely to loosely conforming skin, taught morality, no longer malleable. Baby steps for carbon footprints. Thin breezes, wont to attack mountaintops from low trajectories, prick at my follicles making thoughts stand on end as I perch here on the southwest precipice of Mt. Hiei concentrating on the temple grounds where my brothers are locked into dutiful celebration, my back to the old city of Kyoto. Today, right now, at this moment in time, there is ample reason to celebrate, for I am the gnomon of a sundial and my shadow is growing long and thin in the dusk, a sinew of proclamation.

Day 1000, enlightenment as entropy

Kyoto was nothing more than dirt pounded and tiny stones worn smooth by the souls of my very own feet. Perhaps an insignificant notion, all things considered, but my last memory of the city that consumed seven years of my life. One man can cultivate a stable path in one thousand days, or one thousand men can trample the same path in one day. I chose the former, and really, have always chosen the former. Diligent senses and a trained mind can manipulate experiences into something approaching bliss.

As an outsider I shared very little with the Tendai Buddhists residing on Mt. Hiei aside from the notion that enlightenment can be achieved in one's current life, and this was good enough for them to allow me in to their ranks. They are Buddhists, after all. Their attempts at achieving enlightenment were centered around [Kaihogyo](#), a one-thousand day test of physical and mental endurance that took seven years to complete and ended in either enlightenment or suicide. The unmarked graves that occur along Mt. Hiei's meandering paths, like terrestrial constellations, carry strong messages that can be felt easily, always just above the skin but below the mind. Suicide seemed the more common route; you could feel it. I finished the Kaihogyo. To reiterate: I have always chosen the former.

For the committed Tendai Buddhist, Kaihogyo was a media which carried no message: in fact, running an average of 60km per day over one thousand days was ascetic self denial meant to create a blank state, and in this blank state a Tendai Buddhist may find enlightenment. Undeniably hard to complete and perhaps nearly impossible, I thought, but enlightenment as nothingness was too easy to define, considering the trials we went through. My Kaihogyo was fundamentally different. I defined it as a form of media which carried *all* messages: running's sturdy cadence was the platform I needed to build my world, step by step. Enlightenment and the ways one may achieve it are extremely personal.

For me, there was no such thing as *finding* enlightenment, as I've always viewed enlightenment as something *created*: the product of pure imagination that can only be achieved through copious world experience coupled with the creativity to craft, with this experience, the perfect place for the individual self. Some esoteric places of the world inspire more creation than others, and I've diligently sourced them since my travels and wanderlust began. I've wandered about Blythe Intaglios, The Hanging Temple of Hengshan, Mount Horeb. I've seen the last tree of Ténéré, the Caño Cristales, the Dead Vlei. I've swam Jellyfish Lake, Xkeken Cenote, and Big Diomedea. I've hiked Mount Roraima, the Salar de Uyuni, and the Capo Testa. My means of enlightenment are not to erase, but create. My Kaihogyo was the binary rhythm of right & left - foot, hemisphere and ventricle - that acted as the foundation for the creation of my world.

But this is not the way of the Gyoja.

I believe that the definition is open to debate, especially concerning matters of enlightenment, and thus built my world according to the rules I deemed necessary for the fulfillment of self. Is not enlightenment the fulfillment of self? That point where the soul ceases to exist as an entity contained in the heart of but one man?

And thus my Kaihogyo was: ideas thought with every step ran, senses registered with every heartbeat, thirsts slaked with every bead of sweat fallen, rough drafts completed with every kilometer trodden, places annotated as landmarks passed, characters named with every sunset, angers tempered with every bone broken, love made with milestones documented, enlightenment created with one completed test.

Enlightenment as a form of entropy.

A personalized world.

The Gyoja monks ran and prayed to find a place of nothingness.

I ran and prayed to create my place of everythingness.

I...

Day 998, gil scott

Can't help but notice a Heron that follows me casually and poses, queries relentlessly. It hoots and toots and croaks harshly then makes a shape with it's neck like a question mark of italicized arial narrow. Certainly a problem of infinite regress, infinitely progressing. I watch a few of them gander, gather, on still, shallow water. They flair their wings out, like avian umbrellas, painting shade and shadow on the water top. Beetles, bugs and boatmen skip along the surface tension looking for cool reprieve; they gather under the bird wing umbrella domes and spin quickly on the surface, taking advantage of a nearly frictionless connection between feet and water, a high fidelity environment for speed, acceleration and handling. They attract hungry minnows who stab at the water from dark trajectories below; the bird's necks, spring-loaded like a cobra's, do the same but with greater mastery of sport. A good meal for a bird, not doubt. Kyoto disappears slowly, recedes into the mind's eye, the birds stay. The revolution will not be televised.

[Guilin](#). Lúdí Yán, the reed flute cave, with it's 1200 year old graffiti. Longji Rice Terraces, grains grown on dragon scales which climb mountainside. Yuèliàng Shān, the moon hill, an easy mark. I climb and vendor's follow. Surly vendors unaware that I simply wish to climb, not eat soy-sweetened invertebrates on a stick. I task myself with finding the lake I've seen in photos and climb moon hill for surveying purposes; I have no idea what the lake is called, the specific Chinese characters used don't translate well into Japanese. Mapped, mad worm squiggles of language. It's an easy climb, made easier by a well-kept concrete staircase leading to the top. I am over prepared and under burdened, generally a good situation to be in. The lake is easily located by following the birds circling in it's heat signature; I can see them catching updrafts, wavering on cartoon stink lines. I set my internal compass and abseil down the southern face. What I do next doesn't really count as hiking as much as what I did previously didn't really count as climbing.

The woods are thick and air as refreshing as warm, creamy porridge on a hot summer afternoon. Like bees I make a line. Creeks and sidewalks and vending machines break up the passages into manageable distances and soon I am at the lake, greeted by wide smiles missing teeth and cormorants tethered to hitching posts. The large birds are kept and made hungry, teased with bait too big to swallow. Cords bind their necks just above the crop, cinching the esophagus into a narrow pipe. I think of Blue Whales, the largest animal which ever existed, not even being able to swallow a basketball. The bird masters squeeze them often and uneasily like a bag piper fondling his instrument, and insert fish into their anticipating mouths. Small fish, treats & rewards, are swallowed and digested whole while the larger fish, alive to a degree, are left to wriggle in the widened throat and mouth. And then, like falconry, the cormorants take right off.

Circling the water in the heat signature of the lake they look for prey, larger fish, and swoop down upon them, diving right into the water without hesitation. They are excellent swimmers and proud [fisherbirds](#). Cutting submarine wakes they navigate the shallows, mouth agape, using the fish they hold in their mouths as bait. Big fish willingly dart into the cormorant's mouth looking for an easy meal and are then as easily trapped when the bird clamps its beak; like catching a mouse by filling a cat's mouth with cheese. Neck cinched off, the cormorant cannot swallow his catch, but knows enough to fly back to his master, where he trades the bigger fish for more bait and another small bite to eat, like a dog fetching a stick and looking for some nibbles in return. The process cycles through numerous iterations until tourist bellies are as full as the fisherman's pockets. I ask the fisherman if he's been able to make a good life, and he only replies that... *Like the bird, I can only take in so much to be so happy... I'm just better at obscuring the rope around my neck*, right foot.

And I'm left to wonder if it is, or even was, possible to remove the noose.

Day 996, pacharama

Felt, soft down, goose feathers, a tender embrace, long hair, smell of Jasmine; No, a hard futon, bald heads, incense, feet left to fester. Today's morning rice was bitter. Time flies when eating butter. Butter flies when eating time. We had peaches for dessert. The world smelled light blue and I was ready to run as if there was nothing on the line. My legs were wheels and I was making good time, maybe too fast, too many calories burning my end at both candles. By Hephaestus my wheels were vulcanized of steel hardened ambergris. Juan warned of the dangers of [Yungas Road](#), but of Bolivia in general he had few qualms. The air atop Mt. Hiei grew thin as I neared the peak.

We started high in the cool and dry Altiplano near La Paz. A fool trying an altered piano. Colorful merchants with faces of marker scribbles on walnut shells smiled vaguely Asian grins and offered meals of skewered and cooked Guinea Pig. Charred pink roadkillish things. I ordered two, what's life without trying everything once? Alpacas tethered to potato carts on colorful slack lines lent their handsome, glass-eyed glares to the morning scene, spitting now and again in vain attempts to ruin their mystique. They had haircuts like American teen idols; Alpaca's, the most foppish of animals. Dandies & dudes. A thin dust, too thin to be sand, stirred up in little eddies; perhaps dead skin sloughing off in gusts. Scattered flower petals intervened, bringing the mind back to a restful state for the time being. We were still loitering on the side streets, haggling, buying small idols to protect us on our upcoming adventure. La Paz, the highest capital city in the world. Yuan picked up a coin with Pachamama's face in bas relief. I picked up a thermometer and tested the water to check if it really does boil around 80 °C. It does, sometimes lower, in fact. Pachamama didn't seem impressed and rightly so: boiling temperatures were standardized by relatively modern Europeans, not ancient Bolivians. I wondered what the old bird thinks of English Tea; probably goes right to her pretty little godly head.

We drank hot Yerba Mate through a thin silver bombilla from a shared calabash gourd while plucking rodent meat from little brown bones, and queued up. For such a dangerous ride there were certainly enough takers, colorfully dressed. If a car's standard color was gray, your standard color was lime pink or electric lightbulb. Adventurers flying different flags checked their bikes one last time. Gears gave off the vibe of complexity, moreso than most seemingly *complex* things, for their little teeth needed more attention than a TV remote. Tiny, little teeth working in unison everywhere. There is little fanfare when it's your turn, aside from the internal steeling of nerves and perhaps an errant honking car horn or a siren in the distance.

"Vamonos," Juan could pull it off, his Latin blood made god come out in the details. Pachamama, nestled in Juan's bosom, winked coyly, that haughty goddess. We eased our bikes over the mountain lip, and I wondered aloud what happens when a multi-million dollar fighter eases over the edge of an aircraft

carrier. Juan kissed Pachamama, again, such Latin blood, always tonguing goddesses. There is only a thin cable tethering plane to ship, and certainly that cable is less complex than the gears of a bike.

The Altiplano gradually turned into rainforest as we made our descent through dust screens and cars. In the end we dropped nearly 3.5km in altitude over a 64km stretch of downhill riding, save for a length where we used our legs more than our heads, fuelled by rodent and mate. In order to keep drivers honest, the Bolivian government never installed guardrails despite precipitous 600m drops around the most scenic corners. Plummeting to a quick death is a pretty common thing on Yungas Road. Plummeting, in general, is a verb more prone to be used there than anywhere else.

Gravity worked its magic and we had no choice but to be drawn in to the forest. A grave prospect. Disgustingly humid, completely different from the crispness of La Paz. Warm cream & cold beer. We shed our windbreakers, reduced to sweat and good intentions in the forest valley, which at 1200m above sea level is still higher than most places on earth. They say that heat rises, but when does this rule go awry? Perhaps the forest canopy acts as a heat trap, like mirrored buildings boxing in big cities. A consistent flow of trucks passed us, a little line of jalopies carrying goods to the poorer areas of the inhabited Amazon. Scattered signs offered bits of advice: *Corioco this way, beware of large cats, trees will happily choke you into submission if you don't keep on your feet so tap out, Pepsi*. Exhaustion and a lack of Spanish kept me from deciphering the others. When our hearts slowed to a reasonable state, Juan flagged down a truck, looking for an easy ride back to the top. "That's a flag you have to fly," I was trying to be cooler than I was. Giving animals human names was where I shined, not with snappy repartee. And before I knew it, I was back on top of the mountain, my route satisfactorily finished for the day, with a comforting futon and modest surroundings. Bald heads, robes, and.

Day 995, trial run

A button-shirted reporter was following my run, knowing that I was nearly finished the trials. He ran with a voice recorder, running with it the way a child might if it were a [pudding pop](#) and he were trying to get home before it melted. TV waits for no man.

“You have only five days left, this must be an immense joy for you! Five days left! Just think about it!” My reporter friend was leading me on. I noticed that it’s incredibly hard to be graceful running with one arm extended; I left him hanging. “When you started your trials seven years ago did you think that you...

“And you graduate this year, correct?” Excellent Shinjuku digs, far from Kyoto, a glass tower office decorated with minimalist maximalism: a single black couch, hand-died and stitched. A wooden table carved from the base of a giant red sequoia, two patio chairs, a pink flamingo, a mono-color painting with exquisite border details, one thinly drizzled line that seemed to suggest Jackson Pollock grew tired in his later years.

“My academic degree certainly betrays interest and skill; I could never think of myself as an architect, but I do graduate this year. Though less confident in recollection, I’m more than confident in the creative aspects of construction. Here’s how I see it: in your line of work, recollection and construction are the same sides of different coins and it doesn’t matter which is used, they’re both legal tender. Recollection is subtractive, construction is additive.”

“I see. No architecture for you.”

“First day, first class. Hesitant students all around. In a normal situation your average university entry student is 18 or 19 years old, left to their own devices for the first time. Our class average was 27. I was the young one. These were grown people, long weened. They were stylish, wealthy enough to afford the sweetest, lowest-lying plums. Asymmetrical, European dress shirts, well bred, spoken and ambitious. They liked wine and paid for the good stuff and generally looked like caucasian versions of Grace Jones as painted by Patrick Nagel. It was evident that since we were coming from different places, how could our trajectories match? Sitting in that class was that one node where all of our lifelines would mingle.”

“You graduated though?”

“Certainly did. Knowing what you’re bad at is as important as knowing what you’re good at. Knowing what you dislike is as important as knowing what you like. I was paid in full, so I decided to make lemonade.”

“Why do you want to work for me?”

“The head of architecture, a tenured prick, coughed up the following pearls ‘architects will always have two things in great abundance: a *beautiful wife* and *debt*, and the better you are, the greater of each you have’. The former was in line with my modest intentions, but I was not so much a masochist as to embrace the latter. Also, I’m a creative problem solver.”

“Ah, the former. You’re more of a Sadist, then?”

“You could say so.”

In front of me a clear glass, delicate, filled with cold green tea resting on a blue-trimmed porcelain saucer. Standard Japanese articulation. I drank what was offered and rested the empty glass on its roost without rattling the nest. The singular clink of steady hands. “S before M.” It was daytime and [Kabukicho](#) had lost its edge.

“I like you despite the bullshit pouring out of your mouth. But you’re right, you’re a builder.”

“Ta.” I was channeling British friends. I picked lint from my black lapel, an architect’s attire should be simple yet still retain an air of condescension.

“Last question. Due Diligence. Explain.”

“Research, beginning with the qualitative hunches of first impression,” (that wasn’t a question, I won’t give you an answer), “and following the quantitative facts emanating thereof. Education, work, friends, family, vices, kinks.”

“Eloquently said. We’ll give you a *trial run*.” Mr. Nameless interviewer voiced the italicization like a cartoon Gerrymander, and I was Andover.

The reporter had left sometime around the 10km mark, I think.

Day 984, palloning and larning

I ran past a neighing, braying horse. In natural disasters where people are forced to evacuate an area, often times horses are killed by a specially trained clean-up crew skilled in horse culling. Instead of killing, I named and rode the horse, which made my task easier. When it came to covering a lot of space in a little time, Augusto was the horse. He wore handsome stripes, a braided mane. A little bit street but with elegant confidence.

We rode past a dark barking dog. If the same disaster that befell my horse caught the dog, the crew would certainly rehabilitate him. Dogs are social and need people. I agreed with the trained crew and strung the dog along, as it's nice to have somebody to speak with.

"Bark," said the dog.

"Speak up," I replied.

"BARK," said Jonathon. He was a quick learner. I continued on with Augusto & Jonathon, who looked for sheep to whet his appetite. He would be disappointed if his memory allowed for disappointment. Better than a goldfish, but certainly no elephant.

We galloped, passed a cat. The same disaster crew just lets cats be, cause they're assholes. Left it behind.

We cantered past a MacGuffin, a lovely glowing briefcase. Perhaps there was gold or ivory or butterflies in there. We didn't check.

We ambled past chickens with Slavic accents.

We palloned past a murder of crows, with looks of deceit in their eyes.

We larnered across roosting pigs, somehow.

...and having exhausted the more common [horse gaits](#) and even a few made-up ones, Augusto, Jonathon and I settled in to a nice routine and soon found ourselves back on the mountain, ready for sleep and another day.

Day 978, a scale model of aquatic teeth

A small fish entered the hot spring where we bathed but didn't stay long; Yamagata-san had the good sense to ferry him out of our water and into a small bowl, which he placed beside a wooden basin that we used for shaving. Razors, soap, pot, goldfish. Everything was right where it should be. The fish will certainly live out its days with us in a mutualistic relationship, for as we exhale, we attract mosquitoes. Sated mosquitoes will be drawn to standing water, and there they will lay their eggs below the tension edge of the water. Our little fish will grow fat on these eggs, preserving our skin the hassle of a future bite. Our little bath shark. A scale model of aquatic teeth, surfers in South Africa. Long, open seas for two weeks, the furthest place on earth. Serenity. The impossibility of dirt seeping into your skin when your soul is clean.

Day 970, dandelion tesla coils

Voices of children filtered up through the Kyoto dawn; you could even hear the bells worn by younger children to ward off little brown bears. They jangled like Christmas in America, the giddy jangling of awkward and unsure footfalls. It must be a national holiday for regular people who very rarely get to exchange their suits & business cards for hugs & hiking boots. When I was an innocent child I went with my family to a science center, a type of museum that rich countries have dedicated to things we take for granted. It seemed fitting that we went while visiting my maternal grandmother, who lived in Adachi-ku, Tokyo, and survived fire bombing. People put a lot of energy into living back then. Her hunched back and smoke-colored eyes were thousand-word pictures that implied *cherish what you have, for it could all be gone soon*. Where I grew up people didn't look like this, but then again, they've never been firebombed.

At the science center we came across a Tesla coil, encased in a glass sphere. I stood on the rubber mat and extended my arm out in salute so that my left hand brushed the surface. Big logo-less machines surrounded me, smoke columns catching projections, I felt like Hitler Youth. An electric streak shot out in my direction, connecting at the point of contact. The single connection point looked trying until my mother joined; she touched a spot opposite me and we filled out the little glass sphere with more plasma. It looked less feeble, and somewhat like a lonely dandelion seed wafting through the air with large chunks missing, awkward and unsure flightpaths. My father, sister and cousins soon joined, causing the sphere to light up in nearly all directions. We maneuvered our finger tips into a lattice, massaging the surface, and our little seed took flight. I chased it down Mt. Hiei at the beginning of the day in the early morning sun, and took notice of those seeds who weren't quite flush, those feeble one-point Tesla coils who won't make it as far from home but will still have a chance to grow; they may have been weak, but they still got their chance.

Day 957, an assessment of physiognomies

The few books we keep are more mementos of past intelligence than study guides, though we do keep them in a dignified manner. Inanimate objects often have a dignity that's directly tied to how we treat them, and our books are placed with other artifacts that have accumulated over the past thousand years. A book discussing early Meiji era agriculture may be placed with dessicated fruit from the same time. Ancient Buddhist scrolls are kept with cutlery. When countries curate artifacts they become national emblems, when museum's curate artifacts they become tinder in holy wars. When people curate personal artifacts they become marker's of a life lived and compiled diligently. I try to remember this during my runs, left foot. I try to give my artifacts a dignified, dedicated mental space. The sun setting beyond Mt. Hiei reflected from a far-off sea, lending us a west coast vibe.

We met outside B's Sunset Strip home, studio, crash pad, artist's residence; "you ever notice how the guys who take chances with strange hats usually land weird-but-endearing, slightly crazy hot chicks?" B had a point, it seemed at the time, though his tall, metal-faced pipe hat might've been obscuring his judgement over the long run considering the novelty crap pouring out of China and a definite shortage of girl's uninterested in the finer points of running small typography shops. His certainly wasn't a thinking cap, though it sufficed as a point-making variety, or perhaps as a place marker in crowded clubs. We went shopping in the used clothing areas, looking to spend money ironically in order to fool the opposite sex. We walked through Chinatown, to Mission Road, and bought toe tags at a gift shop tucked into a second floor nook at the Coroner's office. For those with proper eyes, the soul of L.A. is a vibrant thing to behold. It shakes like a happy mutt.

I've been fortunate enough to meet some interesting people in my travels and B qualified beyond a few astute musings and solid skills behind the decks. He spun break beats for thin dancers in dusty warehouses. But for eternity his greatest skill was always knowing who needed to be known, and disparate times called for disparate measures. We found his contact calmly smoking Cappuccino-flavored tobacco at an upscale shisha bar on Los Feliz Blvd. I was unsure as to what to expect, but his abrupt physiognomy suggested encyclopedia editor. His glasses indicated a man who knew how to carry a briefcase, an uptight necktie a puckered little asshole. His pressed-white shirt seemed to say that we had different taste in women; there was even an air about him that suggested we may in fact have different views on the necessity of procreation altogether. Like Darwin, organizing great tomes of information on evolution, yet completely uninterested in spreading his own seed. In fact, despite the clear skies, this man carried an umbrella; could I be wrong with my assessment? Everyone knows that a modern gentleman can only do three things properly: carry an umbrella with confidence and style, treat a girl like a woman, and treat a woman like a queen. I was still working on my umbrella skills. I was glad I left my ego at home.

"Nice to meet you, please call me Maxwell," things got off to an auspicious start.

"Thanks for organizing our tour, Maxwell. That I haven't heard anything about your society tells me I'm looking in the right place."

"Indeed. I'm quite impressed that you found our physical manifestation at all. We're quite open to people who stumble across our facilities, though truth be told it is a rarity. I have to apologize that I have nothing prepared, no brochures, to give to you."

"Not a problem, I didn't expect as such."

"In that case, what did you expect?" Maxwell's helpfulness was suitably of the cryptic variety. B kept the bead glowing on Maxwell's shisha pipe, my rose hip tea arrived, it was cool, but I preferred hip rose tea.

"A tour of your inner sanctum, I'd like to see some of your more esoteric pieces."

"That can be arranged, as I mentioned, we're open to people when they come to us. That we don't invite them is irrelevant."

Founded in 1934 by [Manly P. Hall](#), a figure forgotten from most circles, the Philosophical Research Society lacked the finesse of more traditional research foundations, but made up for it in its stock of rare books on magick, philosophy, and the occult. Maxwell lead the tour, long fingers hovering over the artifacts like a Reiki healer. There is no such thing as bad knowledge, and in Maxwell's presence I devoured the books but especially took notice of their unique arrangement. Books on Satanism were balanced by placing them under a statue of Buddha. This made sense to me.

Senses returned out of order, touch then sight, taste then smell and finally hearing as I pounded the stones smooth once more, almost finished for the day. Numerous statues line the paths of Mt. Hiei and our reliquary houses little more than a few important fragments. When curating my personal artifacts, I have to remember that balanced placement is as important as the artifact itself. I am only sure of one thing: where she fits into the equation.

Day 943, divan japonaise

Every once and a while the drums of morning ritual tap softly and inspire feelings beyond those codified over twenty-five hundred years of Buddhism. They tap into natural urges that need to be identified, but for me, always end in pain. Pain is good, without pain we cannot begin to understand comfort. The drums lifted me directly onto my daily course, and kept pace with me as mountaintop Kyoto forests transformed into Parisian streets. Bells were rung.

Just you, I, and the baker. I wondered aloud if he had a side job baking erotic cakes, or perhaps supplying the city's numerous churches with the Eucharist, but you didn't hear me. The baker certainly had a saucy demeanor that suggested naughty baker or fervent churchgoer. We were sitting at a boulangerie close to our hotel in the [9th Arrondissement](#), eating salad at 4am. It was a traditional french salad composed of six types of meat, day-old bread, cheese of various densities and a few tomatoes for color, owing to an apparent disdain for lettuce. A perfect salad for restoring lost calories.

Earlier that night after a day visiting various shops and museums in the Quartier Pigalle, we found ourselves at the Divan du Monde. Signs indicating that it started out as the Divan Japonaise caught your attention. The women there were beautiful but lacked your graces. They were manicured beauty and you were wild and uncultivated. They were a park and you were a forest.

We had fucked occasionally but until that night had never made love. The act of making love is so disparate from carnal sex. You wore a French dress inspired by an old ukiyo-e print and let your straight hair fall over your shoulders. You kissed me like waves breaking on the shoreline, I undressed you. Our hotel window was open and from the second story we could hear people moving about the streets below, but we were both silent as I entered you. Our silence continued to the bed, and you straddled me without ceremony, placing your hands on my chest, cupping your breasts with the crook of your elbows, heaving them skyward. You moved your hips slowly to the rhythm of some unheard music, and we both came in unison.

And having exhausted my expense account for the job, we returned to Japan.

Day 942, butterfly filaments

Strings lead from my futon into the forest. Some had the delicate features and frayed nodes of old silk thread, others were hardy but worn: perhaps a bit thin, but good rope to have on a boat. Fresh, resplendent strings were the most inviting. I followed a clean one that was tied to a tree stump; there was a phone number, Hello Kitty charm, and photo of a young woman dangling from the point where it turned into a knot. She was pretty, and reminded me of a friend who I hadn't seen in years; the intensity of running can produce a hazy dreamlike state. I didn't recognize the phone number, but the odds were always against me anyways. The roots of trees in old forests always seem to gather as much above ground as below, this phenomenon of overgrowth obscured some of the threads. My resplendent string, though, was still taught and tied high and easy to follow. The roots meandered in verdant tangents, geriatrically knuckled, arthritic.

right foot then left foot, keep up the steady pace.

I didn't expect to come to any clearings, not for fear of stepping on cliches, but for the simple fact that a clearing in a dense canopy forest is as common as an oasis in a desert; the only Camels seen were the occasional discarded butts. Nature will grow in any space available. [Cordyceps](#) will grow from an ant's head, a fungal knife. In lieu of a clearing I followed my string until it was alone, and settled in a place that had very few arthritic roots. An anti-node. I sat down and looked at the photo, the wind carried voices. Sotto voce.

"My name is Midori." Butterflies of all colors fluttered by, gathering in small clusters, moving together like schooling fish.

"Nice to meet you, Miss Green." Was I being polite or just aloof? The clusters broke slightly, allowing them to perch on invisible filaments as if locked in a sliver of time.

"What did you do to me?"

I stood up. The butterflies had finished gathering a few feet in front of me. They formed the outline of a woman. A butterfly matrix in the shape of a girl.

"What did you do to me?"

I pulled the string and the butterflies dispersed, caught on the wind.

"You're not allowed in here, it's against the rules!" Was it a policeman? Was I in trouble? "This is a sanctuary that you're not ready for. The dead populate this place. They make it sacred."

I was dizzy, but managed to follow Midori's string back to my futon where I slept restlessly, with something on my mind.

Day 941, ...

But does the mind really think cohesively, or does it bounce from place to place? Perhaps the mind is best represented as a series of one dimensional strings, lines, each one cohesive unto itself, a single notion of a thought, that intersect at multidimensional nodes to create something more elegant. If we concentrate really hard we may focus on the meaning contained in one string. I suppose this is what the Tendai are trying to achieve.

I'd rather read every string at once; is that not also... Zen?

Day 915, balut challenge

I woke up early and somewhat wet to the chanting of a cock, who enthused ko-ka-li-ko's in Russian and wore a noble smirk, his comb haired in the latest rooster fashion. An absurdist morning already, wonky, but then again, many mornings are as monks abstain from both coffee and fun. Naked and walking an obsidian path I passed a minuscule iridescent ant dragging a single majuscule butterfly wing and thought of how dangerous it would be to fall while windsurfing in South African waters. The rooster, not knowing any sweeter pitches, notably agreed. Today I'll bathe carefully, for while bathwater sharks rarely inflict lasting damage, their abrasive sandpaper skin scuffs the tender parts, like cats with tongues of iron filament. Iron shavings standing in salute on a rare earth magnet. Take the good with the bad, balance is key and no baths are uneventful. In fact, that morning my bath was quite full.

My cautious dip finished, I tucked into the allotted grains: rations of sticky rice creating myriad shapes on the ends of my chopsticks, like snowflakes, in that both are white and have a neutral taste. Tea cleansed the esophagus, a leafy broth dripping from my uvula like spit on a stalactite; time to get ready. I, we and they always wore simple gear when running. Sandals woven from the stuff of tatami mats, a fundoshi, and a thin cotton robe of white or the earthen color and musty smell of austerity. I wore a smile sparingly, if only to conceal a rich inner life, more-so during absurdist days. I put a feather in my cap and called it macroeconomics, a jaunty-ness in my step and.

Step by literal step I found myself in Manila, eating [balut](#) with the locals. Fertilized duck's eggs, manila enveloped embryos sucked back with warm beer, sinewy filaments of underdeveloped proteins finding their way through teeth like fresh corn silk straight from the cob; the baby duck echoing the ko-ka-li-ko of my friend, the Russian rooster. Comrade Rooster, whose single Chevron designated him a Lance Corporal. What would Paul Newman do if he had to eat fifty balut eggs in an hour? Well, I know for certainty that he'd complete the task and teach us a lesson in the art of crafting artisanal salad dressings for any occasion, and wouldn't even miss out on the Christ imagery. An offertory of offal, made especially for hymn.

"Fresh rosemary is key." His baritone rasp and face like a melting Brad Pitt.

"Right on, Paul." My novice tenor and face like a cold water testicle.

There comes a time in every man's life when the eating of embryonic ducks is required to woo potential suitors: for me, this was not that time, have to keep my eyes on the road, which was moving at a pace quicker than usual. Sweat and olive oil obscured my eyes, or was it the smog typical of a Manila mourning (or day, or night)? The eggs crunched but it was not the shell that was drawing mouth blood. It was the poor [Ortolan bunting](#), hunted fresh that morning. In France, I told my fellow balut diners, there is

a unique culinary ritual reserved for top chefs and dying Presidents named Mitterrand.

“The Ortolan Bunting is a small songbird, a passerine that feeds on seeds and sometimes beetles,” the balut diners were all ears of corn, “but not ants or butterfly wings.” This seemed to make sense, since everybody knows that only penguins eat butterfly wings. “In the late summer, Gascons from southwest France catch the birds and begin the process of fattening them up, a cruel process that involves the poking out of eyes,” shocked, the balut diners were all eyes of potato, “which disrupts the birds natural feeding patterns.” “They are force-fed oats and millet and figs, and what once was twenty-five grams of sweet song becomes one-hundred grams of partially digested oats and millet and figs, minus twenty-five grams of bird.” The balut diners put down their embryos in a sympathetic nod, “and after they are fully fattened and bursting, but still alive, they are drowned in brandy or cognac or armagnac and roasted whole.” Ko-ka-li-ko, but I wouldn’t have it, and continued “the diner then drapes his head with a white cloth and inserts the Ortolan carcass whole, with only the beak protruding, and bites down like a flightless bird on a monarch’s wing.” The balut diners were disgusted, digested, and in need of some sort of reconciliation. Women, all with the name *Mary* attached somewhere to their frame fetched dirty ice cubes to cool the hands of their significant others, look~!

“Every culture should be cherished,” came Paul Newman’s disembodied deus ex machina “and the eating of Ortolan is a sacred thing, for the sweetness of the figs and bird is God the Father, and the bitterness of the guts is the suffering of Jesus, and when the tiny bones lacerate the flesh of your mouth, you will taste the salty blood of your own existence and know where you fit in to the grand scheme, and this, this is the holy spirit speaking through you.” I told my fellow balut diners that Paul was right, as he so often is, and we made a toast with warm beer, “to every culture, which should be cherished”, and, “to fresh rosemary.”

Our appetites regained their previous lustre, an iridescent lustre, and we ordered another round of balut to sate the senses.

Day 912, high fever dream

A headache pounding with deliberate cadence. Enlightenment. Uрпиhua-chac wore talking knots, [Quipu](#), like a regal crown and necklace, her head fully ensconced in worked Alpaca hair. One hundred filaments of varying lengths, leading our eyes in various directions or casually swaying, controlled from some central point in the sphere. Ayahuasca. When she sang, the vibrations inspired life in some of the filaments; when we sang, our overlapping reverberations created nodes that prompted the Quipu to intertwine, creating new analog messages. There were others with us, elves perhaps, with neither malice nor names. Their Quipu joined in from time to time with the nadirs and zeniths of reverberation. Language danced before us and we were all interpreters, surveying the language as a Jaguar stalks his prey. We were the Jaguar, with claws where fingerprints used to be and claws where footprints used to be.

Day 899, sapeur intro

Fireflies are gathering atop Mt. Hiei, their swollen bellies glowing, bulbous and flowing, lighting my path. They alight in the dusk, settling on long, untrimmed grasses, awaiting their quarry. The souls of passionate lovers, the souls of men who have died fighting in wars. Keisetsu-jidai. As a child, I caught and caged them, fed them the souls of passionate lovers so they would give me light, and tonight I followed them home. As a child, I caught and caged them, fed them the souls of men who have died fighting in wars so they would give me light, and tonight I followed them home. It all started in my university days.

The rain fell cutting with a hard neon edge, leaving tracers in the thick, persistent humidity of Kabukicho. I was late and Oluwa hated waiting, especially in the rain. He was Nigerian, one of the first Nigerians to come to Tokyo when the Yakuza relaxed their grip on the city. Now they are everywhere one might find prostitution and drugs, and the police turn their backs. Japan is a safe country, after all. Kabukicho wasn't happenstance, unsavory people have always migrated to there, here, like flies to shit. Oluwa was of Yoruba blood, his name meant *God*, and his skin had a slightly purple sheen, a patina and shape that might confuse high-flying birds. He was large, his suits were specially made by tailors unaccustomed to dealing with giants. If Milliners were still common, I'm sure he would wear a jaunty chapeau as well. He was an African [Sapeur](#), a dandy with a fine sartorial sense, not afraid to wear bright yellows or pinks or silk Gucci logo scarves on occasion. The bridge of his nose met his brow at an even plane and fell down to soft, large nostrils which he commonly flared upon exhaling; his hands and feet were large as well, and the women loved him. He was my business partner for the time being, at the time.

"Where you been, man?" Oluwa's voice had a unique depth, loud but muted by the residual hum of our surroundings, like an iceberg calving deep underwater, "I been waiting ten minutes. It's fucking wet out here."

"I apologize, there was a jumper on the subway platform. They should fine his family extra for jumping during rush hour, a real pain in the ass, cleaning crews not so diligent this time."

"I cannot agree more, we cannot have sympathy for him or his family." Oluwa was starting to get Japanese culture, as if his clothes didn't speak for him enough. "Let's go."

I followed Oluwa through [Golden Gai](#). We stopped and chatted with a few of the more outgoing locals, those who were willing to sell Oluwa food untainted by poison. Golden Gai was one of the only places that managed to evade firebombing during WWII and the locals did not have the same love for foreigners that other districts hid so well. Golden Gai was indifference decorated with slabs of old wood and signs written in old Japanese, the types of places that openly advertised whiskey and soba noodles as if they would actually take in patrons they didn't already know. Signs were too inviting a phenomenon

for this place, but here they were; like jumping in front of trains, signs were fashion. We continued after only a few minutes, passed the Shinjuku Ward Office, and alighted on traffic guardrails near his club. We waited for our quarry.

“What about her?” Oluwa had his eyes on a pretty office lady, dressed in the whites and muted pinks of her day job. A tea serving automaton. A transparent umbrella gripped with tension. At her tiny waist her body ran fifty percent in either direction. She would be gorgeous if she were sixty percent legs, but she had to suffice for cute. I said that she wasn’t the type we were looking for. Another girl passed.

“And her?” Again, a pretty office lady, dressed to tease. Short skirt, boots past her knees, a smile that looked like a dolphin’s grin in profile, curling at the edges, teeth up front. Blue-tinted black hair pulled into a high pony tail, twirling a red umbrella fringed with French lace. I said that she wasn’t our type, either, and Oluwa mentioned that he thought she was looking to get raped. “Why else would a girl dress like that and come to Kabukicho? Left in the rain, no guy?” Either Oluwa had a sense of humor more depraved than I thought, or he truly was starting to get Japanese culture. We waited and the rain let up. People once again came out into the streets and cigarettes were lit, fluttering with each step, their bulbous bellies lighting our way, little beads cutting the darkness here and there; a woman -not a girl- walked past us. Her ears peeked coyly from behind long, straight black hair, the backs of which were tattooed with butterfly wings.

“Wait here, Oluwa, I’ve got this one.” I ended up disappointing Oluwa for being late twice in the same night.

Day 867, 四谷怪談

“Tendrils, TEndrils, TENDrils!” The gawky barker calls from his roost, eyes of plasma liquid drama, gathering curious rubes, pigeons and passers-by. “A story of murder and betrayal for the ages! The masterwork of horror Kabuki like none other, [Yotsuya Kaidan](#)!” A line-up follows; (queuing being a bona fide hobby in the vein of the greatest Japanese traditions like tea ceremony or harakiri), “come one, come all, for the show is about to start! Only a few tickets left!” Thin fingers beckon forth, complex skeletal joinery, little fish hooks drawing in their quarry. Every finger bent at a different angle. The line-up shuffles into low gear forward motion, pocket’s empty, coins pulled from strings attached to necks are dropped left and right into tin buckets rattling with commerce; left, right. No smells of popped corn or any other popped vegetables for that matter, no cola slicks sticking feet to ground, no errant semen spattering seats, no surreptitious cellphone surfing; only the low flickering of candle-lit paper lanterns inked red and black with female faces of gore, hanging by sinewy threads on wooden posts lining a darkened stage. Lanterns like little teeth hanging by a single nerve, waiting for the show to start. And in the background, a single note is plucked on the shamisen, a single note to silence the crowd. Heavy doors close, and the theatre earns it’s karma.

And like the shamisen sounding it’s high-pitched tenor the tooth nerve is struck, the lantern face grow restless, indicating presence; a wind from stage left sways the lanterns as if babes in a cradle. A sonata ensues, and Oiwa is stirred from her sleep. She emerges from the lantern, the painted image grown real, beautifully decayed, wandering *wabi-sabi*. Tricked into disfiguring herself with a poisoned cream, the skin on her face sloughs off, like skim gathering on warm, still milk to be picked at with fingernails or claws. Her husband could no longer stay with her, her husband had his own demons already. Her closed mouth makes no sound, she communicates with thin, abrupt huffs of air forced through the grin cut into her throat, she fell on her own blade. Madness, revenge and compassion.

Her ghostly visage exits stage right and re-enters, in human form, stage left. Burning leaves follow her, vanishing into smoke as they hit the stage lights; she watches his story unfold.

Day 854, indifference

I enjoy the simple outside work at the end of the rainy season, which brings with it so much life as to render our temple a verdant thicket. High humidity also brings rot and mold to most fabrics and surfaces, and the time I spend cleaning is the only time I allow my mind to rest. Running is mentally draining. I spend time with the steps leading to my room, cleaning each stone with a fine brush, polishing the spaces in between. I bring our potted plants back outside and give them a thorough watering every evening. Within one day the plants therein will naturally orient themselves to the sun; an amazing process, utterly spiritual. I take shears to the trees and bushes, removing errant branches and stems. I take cuttings of our plum trees, soak them in a rooting solution prepared from willow bark, and plant them where mudslides have exposed areas of dirt looking to be buttressed against further erosion. I do all this extra work in full knowledge that my body, growing frail, cannot possibly expend much more energy than my running consumes.

The difficulties of my trial are starting to show; my skin is becoming translucent like a fallen leaf exposed to the sun for the winter, venous, my gums and nail beds slowly receding. My hair is losing density, a thicket reduced to steppe, my eyes yellowing and breath weakening. I'm looking like an anatomical model of my former self. Emancipation of the soul, emaciation of the body.

"But these are not your dangers," it was my best childhood friend, Aaron, "although they are enemies of a sort."

"Is not your enemy dangerous? Are they not one in the same?" a perfectly valid inquiry, I thought.

"Never. Your enemy is acting against you in a way as to bring about bodily harm, and as you can rely on this, your enemy is not dangerous." Aaron continued with a calm assuredness.

"Your best friends look out for your best intentions, so you can trust them. Your worst enemies look out for your worst intentions, so you can trust them. This is balance, and balanced things are not dangerous."

"What is dangerous, then?" I asked.

"Indifference."

It was good to see Aaron but I had to rest; morning work around the temple moved so casually into my trials that the line delineating them was blurred, and I wondered how many ants I may have ground into a fine pulp while cleaning the steps, how many worms I may have drowned while watering the plants, how many cicada nymphs killed by pruning the bushes and trees, and how many caterpillars I killed in an attempt to bring about new life.

Day 833, volcanoes and the french revolution

Our temple, Enryaku-ji, was built by the Kongo Gumi, a company founded in the year 578 when Prince Shotoku brought a group of engineers from Korea to Osaka. One of the engineers in the group left his Korean heritage behind and decided to start his own business, having been blessed with an incredible knack for carpentry and equally blessed with permission from a generally oppressive Asuka period shogunate. The engineer was gifted in post and beam joinery, but more importantly, knew the appropriate ceremonial uses for each of the numerous complex joinery systems used. In a sense, he was well versed in both the physical and spiritual manifestations of temple building. Knowing how to create is thus directly related to the experience of using, and this is something to always remember. I remember this when running. Our temple was built in the year 767 long after the Korean blood was thinned out.

The Miyadaiku starts with ink; on paper and then applied directly to the wood being cut. With saw, plane, chisel and gimlet the beam starts to take shape. The saws cut and the planes smooth on the pull stroke, heavy chisels alternate with delicate ones, and the seemingly simple to use gimlet bores precise holes and breeds many mistakes in the hands of a novice. Meditating upon the simple is a platform to comprehend the complex. With great patience, events take place and the structure comes together. More often than not, the whole must be arranged at once, for two pieces out of twenty cannot comprehend the intent of the grand design; we must always remember this and follow through with our original plans.

When building worlds, we must mind the chain of events. We must have patience and an eye for detail. We must be conscious of what might happen in any given scenario, and take pains to ensure that events happen accordingly. We cannot be like [Lakagígar](#), whose 8-month eruption disrupted global patterns and not only exacerbated our local Tenmei droughts, but also the French Revolution. Iceland calls me from time to time, and I can find sleep thinking of the sapphire waters of the Blue Lagoon of Svartsengi. Sea water drawn from two thousand meters below, heated by abundant geothermal activity, mineral rich and bacteria free. A calm, clean, rest.

Day 820, the joys of falconry

Nature's helicopter's abound this morning, plucky dragonflies plucking aerial debris, mandibles attached to erratic flight, a fuselage of guts letting slip the dogs of war, some resting on cattails, some in combat mode zeroing in on the enemy with the best insect eyes in nature.

As a child I caught them by tying a hair to a pebble; the long hair of well-scrubbed girls worked much better than my own. Throw the pebble up in the air and the dragonflies mistake it for prey. They attack and get tangled in the hair and fall back to earth. Today, though, they are delighting me on my run. No time to catch them, but smiling is allowed. I am a falconer, a fisherman, from Macedonia, from China.

Day 806, work force acting distance

Passers-by are typically dumbfounded by our runner's unblinking stares, but wish us the requisite *konnichi-wa*'s regardless. The mountains of Japan are so filled with people well-wishing each other on precipitous overhangs and narrow, cedar-filled passages, that it seems shocking to think that our metropolitan centers are so packed with people who rarely speak to each other at all. There must exist a mathematical expression that aims to resolve relative friendliness with distance to city center and population density. Yet today, moderate, warm rains from northerly winds and the promise of thunder kept people off the mountain and children minding their belly buttons for fear of Raijin stealing them, and relegated my standard one-hundred foot stare to a mere ten feet; my clarity was that of a diver hoping for clear blue waters and getting brackish muck.

I didn't expect a long tree to have partially fallen away from my track, and upon seeing it I didn't change my tack. It hung with it's crown bent over a mountain valley, prostrating the rivers below. The tree's roots had removed themselves from their subterranean homes and were slightly obscured by water coursing from the mountain top, looking for the sea, a one-hundred-mile stare. Upon left foot-fall I snagged a root, my sandal catching badly. I came down on my right foot without grace. Indians of the Alberta plains surprising buffaloes, killing them by running them off cliffs, tricking them into breaking their legs. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. Running through physical agony was a different pain than running through mental agony.

Eguchi-san was born blind, his great-grandfather a Samurai retainer for an umbrella political organization in the Meiji shogunate. He could feel things that other's couldn't and learned the arts of moxibustion, acupuncture and bone setting from his own father, who had learned it from the ancient Eguchi family line. Every muscle, tendon and bone had a specific resonance that could be tuned, in the skilled hands of somebody like Eguchi-san, like a piano. It was important to remember that being injured wasn't the same as being broken: injured things may regain their former grace, but being broken meant living with scars that could rise to the surface at any time. My slight mewlings of pain, unnoticed by the other monks upon my return, didn't escape his ears, and he promptly began the fixing process. A prodding fingertip, tuning. I tried to maintain dignified silence as my tendons were re-aligned, exposing a slight metatarsal fracture. I could easily continue with my trials providing I ran with pressure on the outside of my right foot.

Bangladesh air could be caustically chemical one minute and pristine the next, depending on prevailing winds. The time I spent in Chittagong was my own, en route to [Paro Taktsang](#), the Tiger's Nest Monastery of Bhutan where the second Buddha was said to have meditated. Both Chittagong and Paro Taktsang would eventually share equal spirituality in my mind. [Chittagong](#) was a popular center of

commerce with relaxed laws that allowed for large-scale ship-breaking, a dangerous prospect for the dying poor. Large ships of all types, some 150m long with a confident draft, would come to Chittagong to die, ripped apart as if carrion under a hyena's dedicated vice. Even vultures were more elegant and tactful in their scavenging. Ship's histories re-edited with chemicals. Forty-thousand tons of steel coated with one-hundred tons of paint containing lead, cadmium, zinc, arsenic and chromium. Sealants containing PCBs and asbestos. Several thousand litres of various types of oil: engine, bilge, hydraulic, lubricants and grease. A boat is a living organism, work is a force acting through a distance, limbs don't grow back.

Ships broken on beaches, heavy pollutants washing down throats and shorelines. The poor ship breakers would lie with their necks on train tracks near ship-breaking yards; the mild electric buzz emanating from the tracks, they said, alleviated arthritis and general muscle soreness. Some folk remedies work better than others. I am injured and will run tomorrow, and they are broken and will die. Faith manifests itself in something different for everybody.

Day 768, tattoo

One-hundred and eight outlaws of the Song dynasty, sitting on the Water Margin, heroic men with lions, dragons and flowers covering their bodies inspiring woodblock prints overseas. The tools of printing: chisels, gouges and Nara Ink, leaving marks equally well on both wood and human flesh. [Irezumi](#). An art form originating with common people through their common history.

A sign of love, a single tattoo completed with two hand's joined.

Day 767, the medium is massaged

“But the persistence of Ukiyo-e as a dignified form of art has little to do with a resurgence in analog media, I feel it has more to do with the romantic notion of the very translation of Ukiyo-e as *Pictures of the Floating World*. The resurgence and splendor of Ukiyo-e are more a result of naming conventions and how Westerner’s read into these conventions. Marshall McLuhan has as much to do with the success of modern Ukiyo-e as Hakusai did with the old!” I was discussing the arts with my sempai, a Gyoja named Tanaka. Perhaps we discussed this late last week. Macha tea was being prepared, was prepared, by a refined member of our extended family. Left foot. She gracefully whisked powdered green tea into a froth with hand-made accoutrements. Tanaka took a sip, and began,

“but foreigners have a skewed notion as to what the *floating world* is, do they not?”

“Indeed they do,” my tea was almost finished, “they read into the literal aspect of floating, a Christian aspect of the riches of heaven. They see splendor and sometimes demons and accept the good with the bad. The eyes see what the eyes want to see.”

“So they misunderstand completely what the floating world refers to?” Tanaka-san was incredibly intelligent, well meaning and well-spoken, but he lacked one thing that made up a great part of my very essence: partial foreign blood.

“Yes, they are unaware that the floating world described the pleasure-seeking aspects of an urban lifestyle, the brothels, tea houses and kabuki theatres. Edo’s Yoshiwara. They assumed religious connotation, not carnal desire.”

“Foreigner’s seem linguistically stunted.”

“Yes, some of them.”

Mount [Roraima](#) was my floating world, and I had no choice but to visit Venezuela after reading an essay by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle discussing his inspirations for *The Lost World*. I hiked the natural ramp leading to the top, as I wasn’t a good climber at that point, ascending nearly three vertical kilometers. The plateau was otherworldly, thirty-one square kilometers, relatively flat, and shaped like a tree stump hacked off close to the base. My Indian guide struggled to translate creation myths: often times we cannot translate, not for lack of skill, but for lack of shared history. Their hero Makunaima escaped me, but perhaps I was pronouncing his name wrong. Very few gods give you time of day if you bungle the name.

I spent a few weeks atop of Roraima, gathering water from passing clouds and food from passing tourists. I lived a partial ascetic lifestyle, though a traditionalist will likely tell you that ascetics don’t wear neon windbreakers and chunky Casios. In my partial hermitage I composed haiku, trying to reconcile the various floating worlds residing inside me.

Tattooed butterflies,
on the backs of female ears,
caged by strands of hair.

Cloud gardens surround
brothels of Kabukicho,
ladies in waiting.

Dark forest at night,
the glow of animal eyes,
calling me thither.

Big indigo sow,
looking towards the big now,
bacon, anyone?

Day 754, chang

Ours was the Lotus School of Buddhist thought, Tendai, brought over from the Chinese Tiantai school in the 9th century by a well-bred wandering monk named Saicho while travelling and searching for new ways to achieve enlightenment. Alongside Tendai Buddhism, Saicho brought Tea to Japan; and wasn't it I who smuggled tea into India from China? I recall the trials and tribulations of being a naturalist in the employ of the British crown. It seems that we share more common points than my fellow devotees would like to believe. History has since shown where the common Japanese place their allegiance.

The capital had just been moved from Nara to Nagaoka in 784, and then to Kyoto in 795, the same year Saicho ended his hermitage atop Mt. Hiei, which sits northeast of Kyoto, a direction unfavored by court geomancers. He spent nearly ten years atop Mt. Hiei reading Chinese script, and despite the geomancer's warnings his presence there was considered favorable by the new court, which sought to populate monasteries with devotees of faith, not politics. Saicho was to bridge the gap between the Hosso and Sanron schools of thought, which had become corrupt in the preceding years of political turmoil. He left for China in the year 804 in order to study with the Masters and bring back the purest forms of Tiantai thought. He wanted to introduce a new way of thinking in a society historically opposed to change, and I reiterate, perhaps we share more than my fellow devotees would like to believe.

I run, meditating upon the Lotus Sutra, by skillful means I shall achieve enlightenment. The slender limbs of cedar trees reach out to me but I brush off their advances, I shall not venture into the forest this evening. Seductive butterflies dance and fireflies light my way yet they do little for me. The robust smell of hand-cut grass, so much more fragrant than machine cut, permeates the cracks between the air and draws me in; and all there is in front of me are the tall stalks of elephant grass, sharp and wide. My robes fray where they billow out but I am not cut, so I keep running. I have to mind my eyes for errant blades, I cover them casually with my hands, blocking out the retreating sun. My shadow dances from blade to blade, too temporal to register the time. Grey herons can be heard crooning in the distance, voices like familiar spirits, perhaps the gods of Shinto.

I continue at a good pace until my feet get wet. The unique fragrances of Thailand surround me. Low in the horizon, the sun makes an appearance through the tall blades of grass. I continue cautiously, like a cat pawing at the edge of a puddle. I peek through the final blades of grass, moving them aside as a child would a door ajar and am greeted with an immense blanket of pink flowers. They fill my entire field of vision. Little wooden boats can be seen dotting the lake, their low profiles made easier to spot when their pilots stand in appraisal. Lotus Lake. Thailand. A local is more than happy to take me for a ride providing I help him gather snails, the edible shoots of young lotus plants and the equally tasty seeds of mature specimens. We meander the easier to navigate passages of the lake, those passages not

inundated by elephant grass, taking in the natural beauty as the sun recedes into India. We return to the boatman's house at the edges of the lake in time for nightfall.

For that night and many more I am treated to fresh meals prepared by Duchanee and his wife. Shirtless children work hard lining the room with mosquito nets, singing adorable songs about elephants with accents as soft and sweet as a motherly embrace. They are Thai and smiling is their national currency. Vigorously turned away upon my offers to help out, I spend time outside on the docks with the mosquitoes, meditating upon my own Lotus Sutra.

Day 743, crystal lip

"Right on. It's a fucking classic, fact." No reason to sell anybody short, I thought, and it was a good movie. The nuance of swearing was lost on my companion regardless, a bright-eyed, big-brained, effete waif. Oluwa was doing his thing off on the periphery, demonstrating the finer points of dandyism to a group of university students, Aoyama Daigaku by the look of it. A bunch of Wilde Oscars, able to afford a private top-tier education without the hassle or worry of too much study. They'd do fine by pedigree, just as I have, and they had no problems migrating one way to [Omotesando](#) or the other to [Shibuya](#), areas physically bordering each other but stylistically different at the most basic level. The cat street crowd was always interesting in early autumn, relics of the New York dude's extraordinary look blending in with the more refined look of expensive Italian suits and one piece print dresses. Guitars, table tops and dresses: anything made from one piece of something always seems to cost more. Gone the practical inventions of summer clothing, those boring plastic molded sandals, and not quite time for winter's shapeless necessities. We ventured from our Kabukicho stoop on rare occasions. For thousand's of years its been proven that the job of a shepherd is not an easy task.

"Dudes used to battle, in fashion, that is," Oluwa's conversation amused me. "They would crown a King of the Dudes, put a crown on his head, for wearing the most daring and elegant clothes. If they won they would take the crown immediately off since it rarely went with their outfit. One dude won by wearing tights with a pair of knee-length boots. Pure class. They did this in New York and London and they sometimes tried Paris, but to little success, as the French don't like to come to consensuses." Oluwa smiled, he knew very well that there was the pitter patter of French tongues going on right behind him. Magnificent old darlings themselves, wrapped in finery, but on the wrong end of Oluwa's allegiance.

We were at a small bar that specialises in cheap, international house wines to observe, to interact, to measure, to quantify and qualify, to smoke, to drink; part of our job. Between Oluwa and myself there was a faint hint of the Orient, twenty-five percent, one slanted eye between us, which both attracted the locals and initiated slight rapport without too much effort. We were a good team, apparently. No nights that start with California house wines ever finish well, so we stuck with Chilean.

Our task tonight was to take notice of the more confident people; looks had very little to do with anything, especially since all fashion in this area was, an albeit stylish, variation of only three or four themes. We watched people drink: if they could drink while surveying the room through the crystal lip of their glass, we made a note of it and introduced ourselves. If they didn't excuse themselves before smoking, we kept the conversation going. We weren't looking for business cards, so if one was incidentally offered, we politely excused ourselves and left. Business cards are a tether to more respectable worlds. We weren't looking for tethers, rather the telltale signs of nooses. We only needed a

few kids, but the selection was thin. There was too much preening, too much super Ego, no raw Id. We'd have to spend another night like this one, looking someplace else. I looked forward to it all right.

"When did men stop being interested in women? Or sex in general? They care only for the shoes on their feet." At least Oluwa had a motivated sex drive, "we should produce fake movies for real SAG cards. These people are all trend, no substance. Fact."

Yeah, that sounded about right.

Day 741, automaton

The monks amuse themselves with wooden replicas of old [automata](#): an archer that reaches back, pulls from her quiver, and lets fly a miniature arrow at a target placed but sixty centimeters in front. Another fondles the Karakuri Ningyo, a doll of a girl serving tea to perpetuity. An easy cultural attack. Yet in my travels I have seen the Antikythera mechanism and have heard stories that Daedalus used quicksilver to give voices to his statues; and who among regular people cannot find delight in the Canard Digérateur, the digesting duck of Jacques de Vaucanson? Life-sized and sitting atop a large box containing the fine-tuned gears that created the illusion (allusion?), the duck appeared to eat pellets and defecate.

"Sans...le canard de Vaucanson vous n'auriez rien qui fit ressouvenir de la gloire de la France."

"Without Vaucanson's Duck, you have nothing to remind you of the glory of France." Voltaire's cryptic words, perhaps Machiavellian sarcasm, princely. Voltaire was a sheep in architect's clothes.

Yet as I let one foot fall, right, in front of the other, to perpetuity, I cannot help but think that walking is nothing more than controlled falling. I am a running automaton, I am the glory of France, of Germany, of Russia, of China, of America, of Japan, of all places. There are fine-tuned gears, pulleys, springs, cogs, clockwork hidden within me, carrying me, perhaps made by ancient alchemists to amuse kings, seduce women or win wars. In detailing absurdities, Voltaire would spill too much ink writing about me. And yet, my automatic notion is to run further into the forest. Perhaps the world is nothing more than a large box on which I stand, with gears hidden in layers just centimeters from where my feet fall.

I continue this track until I am deep enough to hear the heart of the forest. The whirring of fine mechanics are gone, the only sounds are the groaning of cedar trees, patiently waiting to become temples. I see young trees looking up to their elders, trees damaged by earthquake and lightning as punishment for being too proud, sweet trees dropping fruit for animals.

I see a tree holding a rope, holding it taught, perfectly perpendicular to the earth.

And I see that I am not an automaton, for an automaton wouldn't leave hesitation wounds.

Day 719, bobbin thread

Candles melt too easily in terrestrial storage closets and that we use a fair amount of them necessitates proper keeping for an immense stock. A temple candle looks like a cigarette carved from butter, with a slight and easily overlooked wick. They are unlike candles accustomed to western eyes, whose bulk and surface-area-to-volume ratio allow for a longer burn, suitable for documenting turnkey dinners, but in their ostentation less useful for beating out the steady rhythms of prayer. The main building space on Mt. Hiei has three distinct layers: an understory, platform, and canopy. We keep the candles in unassuming plastic bags, stashed rather inelegantly in the understory, a secret lair beneath the sprawling city of Odessa, whose catacombs contain far more mileage than a trip from London to Moscow.

Ossuaries have always called to me, bone fragments of Saint mixing with the crowds they so pleased, arranged in decadent patterns. The [Sedlec Ossuary](#) inspired a trip to the [Catacombs of Odessa](#), layers of labyrinthine lairs cut from below the city proper to build it higher and more sturdy. Like cutting off the legs of a turtle and sewing them to its back to make it taller, despite it being turtles all the way down. Like Longyearben, there is only one time to visit the Catacombs: in the dead of winter when a very real fear of extreme cold heightens the senses. Cut from limestone and veins of salt the catacombs lack noticeable humidity, though the effect of forcing air through enclosed spaces creates a wind so cold you could freeze ice in the summer, similar to architecture used by ancient Persians to make shaved ice desserts in July, before Jesus was born.

Five large spools of bobbin thread, a 5000m length each.

30L of water, stored evenly in reservoirs lining my dry suit.

2L of hemp seed oil.

A box of long burning candles.

Fire.

A charm shaped like a cartoon cat.

I carried standard gear otherwise, and spent nearly two weeks wandering the underground, drinking oil and water. Like cave exploration I tied my route off with rope, in my case thread, and made slow progress, noting specific hazards and areas where the route became easier. It was slow moving in the cold, but voices that carried on the forced air kept me company. A simple trick to fool the senses involved staring at my candle for a few minutes then suddenly blowing it out. The white ring floating right above my eyes was an easy replacement for the moon, and sleep came easily afterwards. Sleep came less easily when the moon ring was broken in one or more places.

When the last spool was finished I blew out my candle and threw the rest of them away before

lighting the loose end of the thread on fire with a lighter, and raced the thin, glowing bead back home. The race only became somewhat difficult when navigating the points where my thread branched off into various tangents, but I knew the right path by heart.

Day 710, incense manufacture

My father's reliquary was a right angled wood-slat tongue and groove cigar box whose contents included an autographed picture of what looked to be a scientist holding a hermetically sealed first edition of Spider-Man, dented bullet casings from wars only he could understand, a Swiss Army knife laughable by today's standards, and a stack of letters that had the dog ears and tell tail signs of constant fondling. My mother's reliquary was a store-bought shrine of sorts, lacquered wood & multicolored though red and black dominant, that was kept in a special closet in the nook of an unused room at our childhood home. It had the contrasting smells of incense and manufacture, muted by years of disuse. My sister's reliquary was a cobbling together of Disney ephemera, lockets with pictures of princesses, six inches of cut hair gathered in an elastic band, faded tampon insertion instructions, and a single dried flower. Perhaps the flower from a cherry tree, though the petals were largely relegated to dust by the time I grew old enough to respect privacy.

It would take seven-hundred and nine days to detail the contents of my reliquary.

At our temple we have a few carved lengths of ivory amongst numerous scrolls and prints, and like the upper echelons of Freemasonry, only the top few can truly understand their contents.

Day 709, russian smiles

"Running is simple. A one dimensional activity with roots in the sublime: a droplet of water condensing on a kite string high in the heavens left to regain earth at the whim of the elements. Sometimes these elements nullify progress or encourage a more vigorous descent, and at times slivers of water flutter away in unpredictable gusts so that by the time earth is found only the notion, the essence, of water remains," I was filling my Siberian friend in on my philosophies and perhaps coloring outside the lines a little. In feigned acknowledgement, Arkady contorted his face into a proper Russian smile, a visage that suggested a pumpkin slashed with a bayonette more than the standard bird-on-a-horizon favored by Americans when they wish to show teeth. He was a good man, a rare family man in those Vostok parts favored by dead beat dads, which made him trustworthy. He also had his helicopter pilot's license and knew where to find full Mammoth carcasses, having spent years surveying the receding permafrost for the newly democratic government a thousand kilometers north of the Trans-Sib line as it rounds the corner at Khabarovsk, where Russia and Manchurian China share a sneaky deep-throat kiss. Genetic material obscuring borders.

Mammoth ivory has never been a popular commodity, like pork bellies or bat shit left to collect on deserted islands, but the challenge in obtaining a good tusk is an experience that gives it more sentimental value than unpawned gold. Arkady hooked us up with fake Russian military gear and taught us how, in a worst case scenario, to rotate two pairs of underwear in such a way as to keep them at a peak mathematically defined freshness. Certainly this underwear algorithm could be applied to other tasks, and others in the world of business and fast food have seemingly caught on: given a limited set of variables Taco Bell can provide more than enough food-like choices for the uninspired, hungry consumer; who, as it happens, is neither afraid of pork bellies or bat shit. Fully kitted out, we looked like North Korean war-movie extras, mobile slabs of muted greens and faded grays tucked handsomely into black eighteen-eyelet police-style boots and capped with some serious headgear to ward off cold nights.

I knew the short history of Russian Mammoth Ivory before I even set off: used in animistic ritual by various Tungusic peoples of Yakutia and northern Russia, global warming trends starting in the early 90's exposed previously frozen streams and wetlands; places where the Mammoth of the last glacial maximum would stop for a drink or to die as evinced by their remains. The history was certainly longer, but as I said, I knew the short version.

We practiced a unique sort of punctuated equilibrium: long bouts of vodka drinking evolved fitfully into forward motion. I challenged Arkady to a game of travel bingo, which has very little in common with the game enjoyed ironically by hipsters. We scribbled 3x3 grids on a few greasy streaks of napkins that came with Babushka fried bread and began a brainstorming session. If anything, getting rid of the napkins

was closure; my mouth and stomach were at a complete disaccord when it came to eating Siberian friend dough stuffed with happenstance meats.

“1. Line delineating the KT Boundary; 2. deer with vampire teeth; 3. freshwater seal,” I was on a roll, and continued “4. handheld videogame console; 5. graffiti; 6. black dude. Write each of these in one space, any space, in your 3x3 grid. Afterwards we’ll need three more.” I decided to let Arkady in on the fun, and he came up with “broken truck, potato, statue of Lenin.” To make the game last longer, I explained, we needed to jot down items that would be *hard* to find, “and then, if you see one of the items, cross it off. If you can make a line in any direction, you win.”

“There are no negros in Siberia,” he said, as a Siberian Musk deer scampered by. We must be in the highlands. I checked ‘deer with vampire teeth’ off my list. “And Baikal is far that way,” pointing southwest where the nerpa seals live, “come, the helicopter is close by.” Seeing as there were no buildings to draw on, nerpas to oggle, or black dudes, the game seemed difficult enough, but I got a difficult one quickly at least. Arkady yelled something in Russian, his arms waving. To the untrained American ear, Russian inflection sounds incredibly indignant: again, a problem exacerbated by cuts & slashes where grins & smiles should be.

Leonid, Arkady’s brother or sorts, was the muscle. In fact, that’s all he was. Whether guarding a helicopter or simply being muscle poured into the shape of a man, he was. He was blessed with keen, interesting eyes, though. Arkady suffered from vertebrate camera eyes. Not cumbersome, per se, but wired completely wrong. Backwards, upside down, evolutionary baggage. Leonid’s eyes were cephalopodic: lovely little cameras wired simply and without mirror trickery. He was simple, and sometimes there is beauty in simplicity. Just ask any architect erasing lines of junk code, trying to color out of the boundaries a bit. We flew over hundreds of Lenin statues in the Siberian hinterlands. I checked ‘Statue of Lenin’ off my list. Arkady mentioned that, in [Ulan Ude](#), the biggest Lenin head in the world is colloquially referred to as “the biggest Jewish head in the world”, since winter snows crown him with a yarmulke. We touched down beside a murder of crows crowing, and walked to the nearest river. A yellow nub of ivory jutted from the far bank, a rib cage supported shrub growth, an interesting anti-erosion combination. We dug and found Leonid to be in his element, while we were simply exposed to them.

“See that line of Ash?” I lead Arkady’s eyes a few feet from where Leonid was bulldozing through good clay.

“Da.”

“That’s the KT boundary. A reminder that dinosaurs weren’t smart enough to stop a huge asteroid.”

“Da.”

"It means I win. Musk deer, Statue of Lenin, and KT boundary. One line."

"Good work," said Arkady, "but I finished long ago. I crossed off negro, freshwater seal, and graffiti hours ago."

"But it doesn't work that way, Kady, you have to see them with your own eyes."

"But I did. My eyes may be broken, but having such pitiful little eyes is not necessarily a bad thing. My brain had to compensate for these little beads, and in doing so, became bigger. I saw these things in my mind, which counts, you know. My imagination counts." How could I argue. Arkady went on, "All those Lenin statues? Lenin had my eyes. Stalin was stuck with Leonid's eyes, and look where it got him." It certainly didn't get him many remaining statues where Russia turns into a pock-marked moonscape.

While fondling a large chunk of ivory I wondered about my eyes, my journey, where I'd end up. No, I was confident that I'd end up exactly where I wanted to be, as it had to be this way. The journey or destination? I chose the former, for once we found our tusk, a whole new journey began. Again, punctuated equilibrium.

We drank until one morning, a bit muddy and faces ruddy, early in the morning, when a rooster roosted roosting. We had our tusk and were camping near the Kondyor Massif. Roasted? Crowing, ko-ka-li-ko-ing, and the cup rings of wet vodka littered the table landscape like impact craters. Some days are hard, but you harden to them and appreciate the flow. The rings multiplied easily every time we put down our cups: Arkady had never seen an Audi symbol, but recognized the Olympic emblem easily. Like finger painting for adults. Or more like stamp-making. Like the Japanese and their system of avoiding pens in times of hope & crisis. "They use these little stumps -stamps- called hanko to sign their name on important documents; intricately carved ivory signatures. Or turtle shell." Maybe Arkady understood, he gave that smile that Americans misinterpret as condescension.

"We're good at ice hockey," he said, "just hockey will suffice," I added, air slapshotting. We toasted to Alexander Mogilny and decided to take things from the top. "Let's start again at shot one," Arkady's suggestion seemed to make perfect sense, since Russian's rarely drink past shot four. "He wore number 89. He was drafted in 89 and defected in 89, bahl!"

"To life." Arkady began.

"To life," I repeated, raising a cup and downing it for some multiple of the first time.

"To friends."

"To friends," I echoed. Arkady's thick surveying fingers found a balut to nibble on. Alexander Mogilny defecated in the background. He wore number 2 this time.

"To food."

“To potatoes and cabbage,” I added, thinking of Magritte painting a bird while looking at an egg.

“To love.”

“Yes, to love,” and the former Audi symbols took a new meaning. Arkady told us that shot four is a special shot, dedicated to future marriages for single men.

“Drink the shot completely, and slam the cup upside down. The harder your cup hits the table, the more you love your woman.”

I smacked the cup down hard, domestic violence in most places; love in Russia.

“Now look at the wet ring; if it’s a complete ring, you will marry your love and stay married. If it’s a broken ring, you will get divorced once and marry again. If it’s broken in two places, two divorces”. I could see that the Russian system worked as well as the Japanese and their blood-type system. It was getting late, but we took one more shot. “This is the most important shot,” Arkady was bullshitting -who ever heard of shot five! - but we drank anyways.

“To the most important shot!”

And at that, Arkady made a gun shape with his hand and pointed at his neck with his fore and middle fingers. Cocking his head slightly, he fell over. The motion, which simply means *drunk*, was a remnant from the days of Peter the Great. He used to grant heroes neck tattoos and free drinks across the empire. The gesture was not lost on me, and I allowed myself to close my eyes.

Upon left-foot landfall, lotus flowers sprung right up. My right foot left a trail of Audi symbols, and soon I was lying on my futon in Kyoto; it was hardened to me.

Day 634, a poem about haiku

No great mystery to behold a bud, a node, occurs on a branch, blossoms and leaves. Fresh in their inherent green-ness. Like umbrellas, unfolding casually in springtime and withering when the sun grows shadows too long, earning karma through the act of transience, I can relate. I run with a leaf in my hand, the oils from my palm slowly infecting the flesh, making translucent to reveal venous striations, we are the wabi-sabi heart, beauty imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. The art of decay. *Wabi*, the natural and understated elegance, *Sabi*, the sincerity that comes with age.

Day 633, fickle lenses

Kyoto city lights obscure the stars at night, even in our modest surroundings, just as the noise of industry conceals daily bird song during my excursions. Light pollution, left, and air pollution, right, left; footfalls tight. I run past fragments of the Berlin Wall, logos pasted over hopeful graffiti, Nike closing Pandora's box with heavy knotted hands. I run past ground zero and can only feel hesitation, there is a ghost town quality to the area despite all the people. I see the Colossus of Rhodes, run through the Titan's legs, looking up at Helios for Your Eyes Only. Drifters pay respects.

"No, seriously, time to go," I urge Florian on. Left to his own devices he is generally motivated and rarely requires persistent urging, but he also likes to get things just right. He has a New York sensibility and a lot of camera equipment with him that needs a steady sorting hand. A small video camera, two point & clicks, a digital SLR, a few external mics, different devices for sucking in and spewing out information. Cameras are naturally anthropomorphized: robust bodies with fickle lenses and filters; we both know it. I carry his acoustic guitar and a lucha libre mask but am otherwise responsible for food & water. Good belly-filling, fooling, rations, a camel-back, some plastic bottle beer left to warm in the sun, lager lizards. We'll do the British thing tonight, Florian's got the side-fop hair to pull it off. We leave our sleeping bags at the Nagasaki hostel, like Spratly rats on a ship there surely must be some futons squirreled away somewhere on [Gunkanjima](#), and it's good to made due sometimes. Our chartered ferry is nothing more than a small squid boat with a confident captain, getting safely to Gunkanjima is no problem, he assures us. Just like sharks are a vehicle for teeth, squid boats are a vehicle for lighting rigs, we won't miss our mark with all that candlepower. Stunning things, really, inked black. Random characters squirted out in defense, spelling a language which stains the deck. Kind of a surly language.

"Hey Flor, can you read that shit?"

"Naw man."

"Well, I can," I enthuse, "and it says that we'll arrive in about two hours, so put your camera away and join me for a beer. I know I've been a bit selfish with the toasting recently, so we can cheers to whatever you want."

"To Black Peter and bad boys."

Done and done.

The whole trip takes less than 2 hours, and we soon find ourselves in modern ruins. Concrete shambles grown high and dug deep. Very, very Zen.

"We should have brought hard hats." A general consensus. "These masks, they do nothing," McBain isn't lost on our crowd of two. Walls, ceilings, roofs, basic support structures, seem purely

optional here. I look for a load-bearing poster.

“Five-hundred years. When concrete become popular again, the designers said it would last for five-hundred years. And look at this.” I dislodge a piece as easily as chiseling off a chunk of Christmas cake in June. Falling out of usage, it’s like the concrete just gave up.

“I know, it’s beautiful.” Florian was right, “photos taken on a cloudy day look way better than those on a clear day.” I knew what he was saying, and handed him the appropriate camera; for the time being, I was a caddy providing color commentation.

“Did you know that iron wants nothing more than to simply rust? We can get pretty greedy when it comes to iron. We want it grey and lustrous, it wants to be red and crumbly, and we’ve yet to find a happy medium.” Florian shuttered. “Did you know that at it’s peak, Gunkanjima supported a population density of nearly 220,000 people per square mile, most of the men involved in mining undersea coal deposits?” Of course he knew. He also wasn’t afraid to take shots. We had the same philosophy when it came to photography: the world is a wide canvas, so throw hard and often, and every once and a while something will stick. He got a particularly lovely photo of pig bones stacked high in an oil drum, fat candling at the bottom, evidence of an old ramen shop.

Oil replaced coal quickly in the Japanese energy hierarchy, thus the abandonment. The island might have been largely stripped from a mining perspective, but we still found some loose coal for an impromptu barbecue and filled up on meat and lager. We sang a bit, a song made-up on the spot, if only to test the echoes of buildings after they become shells. “Much punchier, I dig the edges and mingling of angles, like an auditorium designed by Escher.” We put on the masks, took a few shots pretending to be banditos. With nobody else around you can be king if you want to, a good thing to remember as right foot falls past left.

Leaving the heavy gear on the first floor and climbing to the eighth floor we found a few futons that were waiting for us under an exposed sky, right where we expected then, the rooftop long since crumbled away. Constant sun exposure left the futons bleached clean, high winds had long since removed any dust. Neither of us knew the proper names of constellations so we made up our own. Hanswurst the buffoon wished us sweet dreams the only way he knew how, that cheeky little pervert.

Gunkanjima, the abandoned, battleship coal island. And Tokyo already gone the way of the Aral Sea.

Day 530, chess sharp

Minor details get noticed in familiar surroundings: a stray cat eyeing a dead fish outside the window of a small wet market near Mt. Hiei. Marlboro butts fattening in the bottom of a coke bottle. Plastic bags from convenience stores sun bleached to inelastic, frayed bundles that look like a shoddy wax mannequin's hair-do. A thin stream of water transporting a rainbow of oil. Soy fermenting, left right where it should be. Right, left, continue through two set of lights, left again and continue on straight until you see the tall masts of harbor & industry. Niku's Jaguar was old but reliable, and perhaps even stylish; it's age showing the sexy curves that have been weeded out in modern cars. A black paint job with a amaranthine patina, pop-up frog eye headlights, and recessed doors approximating falcon wings in dive flight. The ferry terminal was a few miles away, and our mutual silence betrayed an electric excitement. Only one ship per year leaves Cape Town for [Tristan de Cunha](#), the remotest place on earth save those parts of Antarctica that lack measurability. His hand on the wheel, a bug striding across water, Niku exhibited fine motor skills.

One gets exceedingly good at card games when on the open seas. The other option is to get worse at chess. Backgammon, like Switzerland, rice or gray, is neutral. At the very least, this skill re-alignment happens mutually, and the deft gamer will play chess at the height of his partner's card-game prowess and vice versa. Niku was unaware that the expression was *card sharp*, not card shark. It's good to learn something every day. I learned the parts of a boat, port and starboard, and other naming conventions lost to land dwellers. The terminology of ocean travel is a language in it's own accord.

"There was an American Admiral," I casually mentioned to Niku in a vain attempt at legerdemain, "that never lost a battle."

"It was said that he was a brilliant tactician, and fearless." Niku, moved his knight to H6.

"He kept a locker in his office, filled with papers that he consulted with in private before each attack," Niku moved his Queen to G2,

"but while surveying the Malagasy coast, he was bit by a mosquito, and eventually succumbed to malaria," Niku, Queen, G6,

"after his death the other sailors opened up his locker hoping to find the papers he so cherished, the papers that had brought down empires, only to find one piece of paper..." checkmate,

"that said left = port, right = starboard."

Niku was a chess sharp. We then drank for the sake of drinking, both vomiting over the edge into the waters below, for the sake of doing so. Japanese booze was strong.

After a few weeks the mail ship we jumped a ride with reached Calshot harbor in the excellently

named port of Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, the de facto capital of Tristan de Cunha. We noted an interesting 18th century English patois, similar to the inhabitants of Pitcairn, who crept up on TV every so often when women were forced to do terrible things. There was little to see or do.

During our first night with our host family, Niku told me that Tristan de Cunha's population of just over two-hundred and fifty people share only eight family names, yet they represent Scottish, Dutch, Irish, English and Italian heritages. Our island inspection revealed Coke, Windows, Toyota, Disney and even McDonald's products. The Internet and happy meal toys have a similar global reach and appeal.

"We can go home now, Niku, I've confirmed what I wanted to confirm."

"What's that?"

"That one scoop of flotsam taken from the [Great Pacific Garbage Patch](#) will turn up products from the globe's most recognized brands, and these brands can be found nearly anywhere. It's an interesting place to visit, like a flea market."

"The Great Pacific Garbage Patch?"

"Think of a vortex of water the size of Texas, plastic bits, slicks of oil, dead sea life, vinyl. The fish are a write-off, left to writhe, left to right, left, right, a wet market, amaranthine."

Day 500, red herring

Insanity: doing the same thing over *and over* again and expecting different results. I looked up at the sun, high overhead indicating lunch time for the English and nap time for Spaniards, Mr. Einstein's words moving like script as if a giant scroll attached to a biplane with a wing-walking red baroness pirate. The plane lets loose its load, it wavers back to earth, moving like a pendulum, like paper dropped from a second story window on a calm day. Midday heat condenses water on an overhead power line, pooling where it goes slack in the middle. A single droplet finds my eye as I run underneath, fractalizing the words as if light through a prism. Doing again insanity insanity thing different. And thing insanity insanity over different insanity *and* again doing insanity. Again over. Expecting thing different.

Day 436, git'er'done yerself

Prone to climbing and adept at finding the high places of the world while looking for sun in which to bask, cats find us without difficulty and have no problems mewling for handouts when they reach our steps atop the mountain. I suppose I can relate. In general we have no issues with them, though the larger male cats are known to disrupt our potted plants when looking for a box in which to litter. A particularly robust tabby with paws not unlike a catcher's mitt enjoys, against probability, tomatoes. Tanigawa-san has taken it upon himself to act as feline caretaker, and one of his self ordained tasks includes making sure that a perimeter of clear plastic bottles are filled with water and dutifully placed around root vegetables and fruiting plants. The bottles cast fun-house reflections, the cats turn into Siamese fighting fish.

"What's this interesting apparatus, Tanigawa-san?" He was up to something involving an awl, a not-so-heavy rock, some gardening shears, and an old cotton belt. He palmed the rock, a Rube Goldberg smile, and answered my question.

"These plastic bottles are doing a fine job keeping away the cats, but they have so much more potential. They have the ability to give life." As always, my robed brothers, cryptic speak. Tanigawa-san placed the awl business end down on the blue plastic bottle cap and raised the rock slightly, coming down on it with only a slight vigor, like cracking a hazelnut for your grandmother. A few strokes and a hole was made in the bottle cap; he rested the awl and rock to the side. Next he took the cotton belt and with the shears cut a short length from it, maybe thirty centimeters; he placed both lengths of belt and the shears to the side as well. He paused for half a minute looking at his tools, looking at the job he'd completed thus far. A quizzical look on his face.

"Oh, actually, can you please hold this?" He gave me the rock, I smiled. A perfect sense of humor befitting his task & title. I put the rock down and watched him pick up the short length of belt, which he began twisting at one end. After it was coiled tightly, he asked that I remove the bottle cap and hand it to him.

"Pretty simple, right? Not everything needs density, some things want simplicity," he was threading the belt through the hole in the bottle cap, pulling it so that about ten centimeters hung through the bottom of the hole, the belt became uncoiled. Slowly, he dipped the ten centimeter end into the plastic bottle and screwed the cap back on. I sat and watched, not quite getting it yet.

"Simple things are sometimes misunderstood. Your tear ducts don't produce tears, they actually remove them, pulling them upwards into your nasal cavity by capillary action; see, look," and I could see that the water was slowly wicking up the belt. The whole apparatus looked like an out of place Molotov

cocktail. “When I stick the long end into the soil of our potted plants, the water....

The bright sodium lights of interrogation hurt my eyes, so much for dealing with new clients. They usually come to us; our office is softer. This place was just glaring commissioned. Oluwa’s nonchalance held it all together.

“So, you don’t think we’re working up to our potential?” It was a bold question from a man I didn’t know, but I held firm. “Correct sir, I think your company, what’s left of your empire, is capable of so much more, and I’m positive we can help. As you can see, neither my business partner or I are Japanese; well, fully Japanese. Your problem can be solved with innovative thinking, and without meaning to offend, Japanese people often have a difficult time innovating, just as the Scottish have a difficult time suntanning. Perhaps it has to do with inter-communication protocols or the education system itself, but really, this is not my concern. What does concern me is that Japanese are excellent at taking a new idea and making it better, but quite bad at having that new idea in the first place. Think in terms of consumer electronics, computers, automotive manufacturing, communications, even politics, philosophy and religion... I could go on, but the look in your eyes tell me that you’re in agreement, and that we should continue with the more detailed, pertinent points of our potential arrangement.”

“I like your confidence, Mr... sorry, what’s your name?” I didn’t hesitate to give him our boilerplate answer, “no names, no paper trail, we work on twenty-five percent up front, expenses, seventy-five percent on the back end, and handshakes only.”

“No problem, though don’t be upset if I refer to you as *Banana*, and you,” looking at Oluwa, “[Sambo](#).” It was acceptable racism given the circumstances, and the client is always right. “Please,” continued our client, “call me Mike Miike.” A nice pseudonym, I thought, or more appropriately *nom de guerre*. Mike went through his laundry list, we didn’t take notes.

Day 435, looted art

Persimmons grow at the edges of the loosely defined boundaries of our temple complex, along with hybridized citrus trees of no real type. They have a small, hard fruit that is edible on a technicality. There is no competition for space though the persimmons are perhaps more aggressive when it comes to colonization. Hardy and requiring little care until ripe fruits are wanted, they nonetheless provide us nourishment in the late fall.

I have seen the painting of Six Persimmons which Orientalist Arthur Waley called “passion... congealed into stupendous calm.” It resides in another temple complex close by despite being of Thirteenth Century Song Dynasty origin. The meaning behind this painting is an irony not lost on me: a young persimmon is bitter and inedible, a fruit of immense astringence, though upon aging it turns into a thing of beauty and delicate sweetness. I think of this painting when I tend to my favorite tree: medium sized but sturdy and not too tall to require a ladder. It is easily climbed and seems to like my footholds.

I know you better than you think, and I know you have to do this, please have no regrets. Autumn winds are more articulate than their summer counterparts.

But can it not wait, just a few more weeks?

I climbed the tree with minimal gear and effort, save for pre-cut lengths of twine wrapped loosely around my neck and a pair of sheers on a string attached to my belt. It is easiest working from top-to-bottom, outside to inside. The trunk easily supported my force against the branches, and I began snipping each persimmon individually, perhaps two centimeters from the floral stem. Fruit in hand, I tied a length of twine to the stem and then tied the other end from whence I cut. Each individual fruit was processed this way such that the tree eventually looked as if it had streamers attached to it, each streamer weighted with an astringent orange ball dangling at the end. The fruits could then be left this way to mature as the winds turned colder, and any uneaten fruits would dry like raisins.

Already ripened, she smiled at me amongst the fruit.

Day 434, parable

And could not be cursed for being barren as a fig tree.

The fine red particulate of the Gobi desert is taking a trip across the Sea of Japan this morning, getting in my eyes and soft, wet tissues. My robes quickly stain a chalky pinkish hue the color of a flamingo youngling just taking to sitting at the adult table. Sand dunes were cut, scraped level by dragged Iraqi Starships. Burly husks of metal left here and there for the Bedouin scrappers, and the Palace of Herod the Great excavated in the mid-sixties in search of answers. They found a cache of seeds in a dry pot, which they let sit while more important work was underway. Forgotten again. The seeds of a [Judean Date Palm](#), extinct since just after Christ, who lived closer to the advent of cellular technology than he did the construction of the pyramids of Giza. Seeds which sat for nearly two thousand years and forty years finally germinated in a hormone rich solution conducive to really turning them on, and then planted in the desert from whence they came.

And come one of them did, a fine young sapling of numerous fronds, new genetic diversity for the world revived after so long a time. The oldest viable seed; never in the field of human metaphor was so much owed by so many to so few. The palm, only two meters tall, is a giant; infinitely bigger than any of it's kind. It's with me now, bent from exertion, ancient, branching out into my mind. Each frond a Hindu deity with arms and hands to spare. Sand impressions are left right with footfall, a fine trail, a fine wake, a fine awake, for a fine day.

Day 399, a most splendid dome

Today is gray Memento Mori, the sfumato approach of Da Vinci seeping in to waking life, dulling the edges, obscuring peripheries. All words exchanged carry the weight of incense, all touch the heaviness of loadstone. One of our brothers has passed away in the night. He is found in the morning with body earthen. We prepare it for his family somewhere. I run through grainy b-roll.

And see the completion of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, the Duomo, in Florence, Italy. The architect Brunelleschi is dressed as our newly departed; a brownish smock with a plain sash cinching the waist. No shoes. He carries a shovel and a grin. He has not been able to keep money out of the temple, remnants of his days as a goldsmith, perhaps; never Cosimo de Medeci's favorite son. He has built the Dome without interior wooden scaffolding. The Dome instead resting on piles of piles of dreck and detritus, a medium filled intermittently with gold coins.

Poor and destitute citizens of Florence gather with buckets, carts and strong song and thoughts, for today they will dig and perhaps later eat and drink, depending on fortunes. The harder you work the luckier you are, a global truth. They will excavate the church, just completed, carrying as much refuse as their hands and hearts allow. They wait outside, outside near the zebra-lined facade, for their chance to force their way in. Dipping their buckets as if collecting water, and throwing out their arms for bread, they will walk out of the church in due time with heavy burdens. A few lucky souls will find gold coins hidden in the debris they cart away, enough salary to support their family for the year. The Dome is thus built on garbage supports, with more than enough people eager to help out. Brunelleschi will be called a genius.

We are not Christian but we understand god at work and respect the many layers of Him. Our brother passes with the utmost respect.

Day 389, pin pulled

Imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. A wooden bowl cut on a lathe is an act of reduction, a clay bowl spun on a pottery wheel an act of addition. Oluwa was wood, I was clay. He was cut out to do the task whereas I was a welcome addition and in our ways we were both equally useful.

A divorced wife wanting alimony. Increasing prices on hops driving local brewers out of business. A company CEO looking to muscle out the board. Poor resource management at poultry farms needing pseudo-government intervention. A replacement porn actress. Twenty thousand cubic liters of cement aggregate. A penthouse in Paris. A giant Japanese salamander. An item lost. Everybody wanted something, we just provided a paper-trail-free service to get that something.

Problems, whatever they may be, cease being problems when we showed up. For the right price.

Japan is a country with little perceived corruption; they've certainly benefited from that greatest of twentieth century art forms: marketing. Black goods markets, like zaibatsu, were hidden from the public eye with the smoke and mirrors of World War II, and when the air cleared after cease fire they reemerged as grey service markets. We were so accepted by common society that we rarely had to flash our teeth. We were even accepted by the criminal underbelly of Japan, those ghosts who walk in shadows only to materialise vicariously through the services companies like ours provided, which were more common than societal norms were wont to reveal. We even had overseas expense accounts and foreign clients. Travel was common, though I didn't appreciate it as much back then.

I had been seeing her on the side for obvious reasons, and keeping this a secret for equally obvious reasons. I took her call while Oluwa was preening, pea-cocking, over-clocking.

"You know babe, calling me at this number is like speaking over the din of grenade pins hitting the floor." Overly dramatic was the new pink.

"I know, I'm sorry, but I need your help. Think of me as a client, you're all I have left it seems."

"I'm pretty sure I can't, all things considered," I could hear the striker pin shuddering into position.

"My name is already attached to your retained services."

"Your name may be attached, but not your line of credit. You can't dip in and out of those accounts without raising eyebrows, so put that pretty ridge of yours down," a barely audible clank as striker pin meets cap. Soon, hissing.

"For what I have in mind, the costs will never be discovered." I could barely hear her above the hissing of the internal fuse, "and since my name is on the retainer, I could easily thi..."

Her four seconds were up, the detonator ignited. A bright flash of sun. Back in time for dinner. A small, wooden bowl of rice and a ceramic bowl of miso soup. She danced in there, in the graceful undulations of nori floating in hot water.

Day 342, duality

Consider yourself lucky: hiragana, katakana and the Latin alphabet are all comprehended by the left hemisphere of your brain. Kanji the right. Left footfall. Use this to your advantage, left, right. You know all three languages, your brain is chock full of linguistic goodness. Most struggle to reconcile sides.

Day 300, no glove no love

Post-quake mountaintop electioneering, realpolitik, the long grubby arms of Johnny Polly have no problems finding their way to the cloudy lofts and tops of Kyoto; and it wouldn't even be that bad if the election posters were better. Uninspiring haircuts chopped in 7/3 parts, forced smiles, grins at best shit-eating, are painful to behold and look like advertisements for clear dental floss and invisible cheek hooks more than pictures meant to coerce a young generation into voting. Politico-Ethical cannibals as well, like kitty-coroner Starbucks buttressing the busy intersections of glass encased cities, fishglobes. The signs litter mountain paths even though they know our stance. Japan has a long and exquisitely detailed history of earthquakes rattling monsters from peaceful slumber; the bigger the earthquake, the bigger the monster.

"Nothing is more painful than the sting of the bullet ant, the most painful sting of all bugs in the whole world," the words of a supposed former cannibal with the Christian name of Frances, "a bite on the foot has no problems sending the pure pain of fire to your head instantly, it will confuse and disorient you. Seriously mess with your head. It is called the twenty-four ant, you will hurt for twenty-four hours with only one sting." Frances drew from the hollow vine pipe he so cherished, sending black ghosts of acrid smoke into the trees. Likely some ancestral worship or allusion. We drank some processed guarana to stoke the belly fires, he chanted some Tupian chant, we wandered in aimless spirals.

"The Satere-Mawe will find us when they choose, they are probably looking at us now. They have eyes in all the trees and animals and birds, hopefully they can see my smoke, see that we are not dangerous, see that we have nothing for them to take." I had purposely left a few choice items at our last camp. The proto-punk experience would like be lost on them anyway.

I was in the Brazilian Amazon looking for the Satere-Mawe, an infrequently contacted tribe of whom more legends were written about than they had of their own. I wanted to become a man in the sense that the Satere-Mawe became men: by wearing a glove of woven [bullet ants](#). I paid Frances some good coin to lead me into the jungle. He had but three tasks: not to prosthetize the natives, eat me, or fail in finding the tribe responsible for the stinging gloves. We pressed forward, veering to the left every once & a while, enjoying the simple pleasures of hacking through thick vines with dull machetes. We cut a path for ourselves to double back on. "Come, this way." Good boy, Frances. He must've been sixteen at most. Short but full height, an inordinate amount of strength in his hairless forearms, built for the jungle, atavisms in the right place.

They found us upon nightfall; another smallish fellow with skin like meat left in the sun was the apparent ambassador. Frances exchanged a few mutually intelligible words. "You give them your lighter,

they take us into the jungle.” We were already in the jungle but no point arguing the finer points of the arrangement. Their homes were standard from a jungle perspective: thatched roofs resting on open frames, mosquitoes kept away by burning key proportions of the right plants. Shirtless women with breasts like panting giraffe’s tongues and happy children left to play. I was surprised that they fed us so well with so little and were more than generous; people are people everywhere, and perhaps I was South American-looking enough to slip through the cracks. We slept with relative ease and woke quite early the next morning to set traps of nectar and crushed grubs a few kilometers away from the village; by mid-afternoon we had collected enough ants for the ritual.

Frances gave me a rundown as to what was going to happen: the ants will be sedated in a mild alcohol until they are motionless but not dead. They will then be woven into a glove with their stingers facing inwards. Hundreds of them will be used. I will dip my left hand in charcoal and then place it into the glove as the ants wake up and begin writhing, and will keep it there until my arm can no longer move.

And this is exactly what happened. A third degree burn with people secretly plucking out the hairs that grew between scabs, and it lasted for nearly a week.

“You endure the pain of small monsters to become a man. You become a man to challenge the big monsters. You have only worn the glove once, the young boys of Satere-Mawe wear the glove twenty times to become men. You will become a man, but eventually.”

Frances was right.

Day 200, disaster

The mountain is alive with insects working through prime numbers. Thick waves of cicadas lacking the elegant notes of birds or the comfort of crickets; instead concentrating on an irritating, nonsensical whine that few hold in high esteem. Prime Minister Kan was in office at the time. He also spent years underground for one summer in the sun, again, meat left out in the sun, left foot.

Everybody assumed that the next [Great Kanto Quake](#) would hit Tokyo and preparations were made for the second coming. The original quake was not very destructive in the sense that one might assume a quake to be destructive: few buildings were rattlesnaked from their foundations. Wood, like birdsong, is an elegant material that flexes under pressure, a longbow in battle. The quake simply made houses dance, but during this dance the open fires of cooking and heating spilled from their cast-iron skillets and found new homes. Tatami is little more than tinder, and like iron wanting to become rust, tinder has ambitions of fire and consumption when left to its own inspirations.

The city burned as Rome and London before it. Across the world first-class cities are in their third, fourth, fifth iterations, built up from ashes. I have seen Pompeii and know the powers of Vesuvius. The new metropolis was built of concrete and glass upon layers and layers of insulation. School children had earthquake drills as Americans have fire drills, though decidedly more adorable: the cushions on top of their chairs, decorated with characters in-vogue, doubled as protective hats. Like muster stations on boats, public parks around the great city seemingly existed solely to serve as meeting places in times of emergency. Tremors were common and viewed of as less of a nuisance than waiting for your computer to boot up. So when the Great Kanto Quake of 2011 skipped Kanto entirely, beyond some hardcore sympathetic rattling, locals were surprised. Some perhaps even a bit disappointed in the Teutonic sense.

Tokyo really only experienced secondary fallout during the disaster, despite overseas news channels insistence at reporting otherwise. News *from* Tokyo is not necessarily news *about* Tokyo, a semantic point lost in slapdash journalism. That's not to say that hearsay didn't eventually become twenty-twenty hindsight, but for the most part people carried on their lives as usual with perhaps a little bit less wastefulness in their energy consumption. Capitalizing on harsh air conditioning policies the fashion houses of Tokyo created breezy summer lines for the office, metrosexualizing window-sitters who were simply happy with prescribed smoke breaks. *They* didn't need magazines and government mandates to help them look cool. Japanese women, blessed with such integrity so as to not sweat in the most dire of circumstances, were in their element. So what happened next came as a double surprise for everybody except Prime Minister Kan, who promptly stepped down amidst controversy. His position of power kept him away from being a prophet in the classic sense.

Day 185, london calling

"It's Mike Miike," Oluwa passed me our shared cellphone, a disposable number, the liberated whites of his eyes indicating a mass displeasure on the other end, "play nice, he's got me covered for a permanent residency visa when we finish the job."

"Hello, Mr. Miike, how may I help you?" It was the least I could do.

"Banana, we'll drop the politesse for the time being as I tell you a little story. You probably already know the punchline, but you know how sometimes when your friends tell jokes that you've heard before, it's always nice to hear their spin on it? It's going to be one of those times, just remember that I'm not your friend". I dropped in the appropriate uh-huh's as he continued, "my phone has, uh, some interesting software on it that some of the engineers that work for me punched up for occasions just like these." A short pause, the shuffling sound of his phone changing hands, left hanging momentarily, "Check out the cell phone in your hand right now, see those little bars that indicate reception? Well, when I have a voicemail on my private overseas account, those little lights dance every five seconds, a subtle chorus line. See those little bars indicating battery power left? Whenever somebody is trying to call me on a sub-line, those bars drop to zero until I answer, *if* I choose to answer. But this isn't the really important function I wanted to speak with you about. No, the really important function is much more elegant in a way. When somebody who isn't wearing my watch, which costs more than our contract, picks up my phone; i.e. somebody who isn't me, it tracks what they do and activates the video camera." Punchline.

Miike waited while I swallowed my spit, and continued, "So when my daugh..."

The grenade was a flash bang, reporting, disorienting. The fluid in my ears shifted dynamically, tinnitus at least has a telltale ringing, this was lunar silence, an absence of gravity, of wind. What could I do but close my eyes.

Taiko drumming from a local matsuri festival; I could feel each beat uplifting my heart as I ran closer to the source, analog excitement. Children dressed in colorful yukata, summer kimono; the floral print of old mingling with modern designs featuring Disney characters. Little girl's with ribbons holding pigtailed in place, little glass bulbs attached to the ribbons, filled with colorful beads that look like rock candy. Boys eating soy and sugar glazed squid on sticks, gummy fingers prodding at mom in playful jest. I run past [vendors](#) of all sorts; taco yaki, okonomiyaki, yakitori, ramen, nikuman, cotton candy, yakisoba, beer, and see young couples still in their high school uniforms trying to win each other prizes of baby turtles and posters of Korean idols. I seem to be getting closer to the source, it's much harder to run in such crowds, but delightful nonetheless. The taiko master let his drum roll out slowly, a low dulcimer,

building to a crescendo as old women danced old dances.

My head beat a painful pulse, Oluwa was left cleaning up vomit.

Day 184, mixed metaphors

Much of the former coastline was made from old garbage forced under pressure into wet, uneven corners, but aside from kitted-out foragers, very few people ever took first-hand notice of the old coastline unless they happened across chunks of it adrift at sea. The land buttressing Tokyo from the vast ocean was therefore little more than [Schrodinger's cat](#) for civil engineers, at once trapped in a constant state of being both liquid and solid. A non-Newtonian fluid waiting for some action to work upon it; a cat in a box made from cornstarch and water.

The exorbitant land values of places like Ginza and Akasaka and Marunouchi could not be replicated so quickly, but the magistrates of manufacturing; railway, health and construction, were borrowing money from foreign banks before the grieving even began and planning for a new tomorrow before dawn. Large chunks of former areas of elegance bobbed about in the north Pacific, mingling with plasticized garbage from around the globe.

Day 115, presque vu

A breakfast of hard boiled tofu, simple and unfertilised. Comforting pleasures washed down with tea, chemically increasing my core temperature. Trickle of sweat pin-stripe my face, giving it a powersuit sheen. I could negotiate the sole from a heel with this face. A small, unripe plum occupies the seat beside me, it's fall to earth prompting a thin crack to appear on its surface, the art of decay carried away by ants before a real chance at life. The fruit is destroyed and the seed is nonviable, I don't allow it to be. What did they call that food in Manila? It's on the tip of my tongue. Running is easier with something in your belly and something on the tip of your tongue.

Day 114, atavism

I awoke to a baby crying, a soft flutter of sound in the distance, the sound coming from beyond the mountain. A sound filtered by forest leaves. I cupped my right hand, left foot, around my left ear to get a better sense of location and the claws dug in slightly, leaving a half-moon shaped scar. My symmetry ruined for the time being. Hairline trickles of blood originating from above my ear, encircling it in red trails drawn by small beads, a moat. A volcanic island with a soft caldera. Again, the baby cried, this time more animistic, a raw form of [atavistic](#) crying though not any more or any less desperate than before. I put my damaged ear to the ground as if to track the movements of an army but heard only whispers. A light drizzle picked up pace from a source higher in the mountains, prompting gossamer lines of water to cut paths around ant hills, encouraging the stream to retreat to the forests below. And me, my damaged left ear to the ground, listening to whispers. I stood up and noticed that a little pool of blood had gathered in an indentation on a stone edge on the path where I was standing, the tension edge willing to break at any point.

A butterfly danced around my head, taking notice of my wounded ear, taking notice of my claws. Not so strong in bad weather, wind carried the butterfly to a small overhang that time had eroded. Tree roots tried desperately to keep the ledge together, striations of rock visible. Trees are quite adept at digging into history. The butterfly, wings wet and useless, tipped over the edge and landed in a pool a few feet away from me. Right, upright, it looked and acted like a sailboat, and came directly for me on a downwind tack.

Finding my indentation of pooled blood, it broke the tenuous edge, and sent a thin, red stream down the mountain. I followed it a short while, the stream getting more pronounced the deeper I made it into the forest. It was impossible to recognize exactly when the stream became ribbon, and equally impossible to recognize the ribbon becoming flesh.

Day 110, piebald bitch

Ink blotch clouds, center-thick and edge-dilute, clumped together on the southwestern horizon. An apparent gift from Taiwan, or perhaps the Philippines. A great density of moths with frayed wings, or a single Jaguar on the hunt, eyeing Japan as potential prey. Miserable conditions for running, right foot, left foot, put yourself in a warm place. Balinese kites, lengthy dragons pulled by white-toothed, brown-skinned boys in board shorts. Ubud, left to age gracefully, a wonderful town, simple, honest and certainly not flashy like Kuta, with it's freeloading surfers and occasional bombs. A lyric from a poet, *it was cutting it was done with style...*

We walked hand-in-hand in those earlier years, we thought alike, you finished my sentences. Our hired man, Jonathon, an overly friendly local drove us to the frayed edges of Ubud and parked under a wispy tree, right between two hand-built pick up trucks laden with potatoes. Remember the dog saving our space? A female, piebald, all swollen nipples. I had never seen such a bitch. Her pups were nowhere to be found, though little streams of lactation indicated that they were in the general vicinity and likely hungry. She moved upon hearing Jonathon's engine, and we got out before the wheels even stopped spinning.

"I'm staying here," Jonathon said, "not a good place for tourists, not a good place for me. They see me with you, and remember my face." Ubud, our little slice of heaven.

All eyes focused on us, schools of fish pointing in the same direction. To fit in with the locals we walked with no sense of purpose, levels of slack approaching indie rock superstardom, and turned back at the forest fringes. Cartoon signs of thieving monkeys and children's balloons, long deflated or popped, littered the canopy edges. Ribbons wafted in the breeze, little lines, red, and a smell indicating rattan work in the distance. Hungry, we walked back to where we could see Jonathon in our peripheral and began haggling with an old lady selling nubs of Chicken Satay. We paid three cents for a mug-sized serving, which I haggled down from five. Jonathon told us that haggling was necessary, if only to keep balance on the island. "Balance keeps a middle class, unbalance brings wealth to the undeserving." In all my symmetry, I supposed I was still somehow unbalanced.

We walked a few feet away from the cart. I ate two pieces using a toothpick as a skewer, stabbing at the flesh, and easy kill, and you walked back to throw away your gum. Stopping short of the cart, at just enough of an angle to peer in, you vomited. Six dead kittens sat atop a green field of discarded cabbage, flies circling, collecting their own Karma.

Think of someplace warm, right footfall.

Day 105, jacques cousteau

I was sitting at the water's edge, dark blue water that indicated a sudden drop-off. It might have been the [Great Blue Hole](#) in Belize; I swam there once in a past life, left things as they were. The current was strong and my perch sharp and tenuous, cutting flakes of exposed ancient coral remnants gripped. A trickle of blood from my hands, from my claws where fingers used to be, found water in meandering rivulets. Victorian hair, no, straight hair. Other bloodlines mingled with bird droppings or pooled in pock-marked crevasses, dug out by crabs and worms a millennia ago. The essence would certainly attract sharks, I thought.

I know you better than you think, but what did you do to us?

I was right about the sharks, they came unseen but I could feel them brush past my toes now and again. Skin like iron filament, iron shavings standing at right angles, inspired by some far away rare-earth magnet. The dark blue water obscured their intentions. Wind came, and it brought with it the dead

stale grass smell of tatami. Moss, mostly.

I know you better than you think, but what did you do to all of us?

My skin was taught from the cool water, each follicle of leg hair felt individually, standing on end. Little electric buzzes indicating some sort of motion, cat's whiskers. The sharks were nibbling, pulling slowly, I could feel them working downwards, deeper. The salt-water smelled of incense, it splashed against my forehead, ran down into my eyes, olive oil. The sharks mined greater depths.

My futon was wet and I found a string tied to my toe which was being tugged gently. There was no knot, but rather a bow, a girlish bow, with a phone number attached. How many numbers are in a phone number? There were six numbers and a bar code. The string lead down Mt. Hiei. I was being pulled through one dimension, down the mountain, down the path I had intentions of running nine-hundred and ninety-seven times. A small trickle of blood on the line, like a droplet of water on a kite string, leading the way. Now and again the blood would slake off, and where it fell butterflies sprung up like opening lotus flowers. Amaranthine butterflies, bird wings, registered shapes darker than dawn. The string ended at a spot on the ground where the arthritic knots of tree roots gathered into some sort of node; a final butterfly came forth. I waited for them to perch on their invisible lines, to create the form of a girl. They didn't disappoint.

Midori spoke cautiously, didn't make eye contact, as if what we went through, as if what I put her

through, “what brings you around here?” she knew the answer.

“Thin, toe-tagged tendrils, blood, and butterflies,” I responded.

“No, not the butterflies, they aren’t a product, more of a gimmick,” Midori’s humor was consistent at least. Like so many young Japanese women, she knew how to market herself, a twentieth century Da Vinci.

“Is this [Aokigahara](#)?”

I thought Aokigahara was a place for suicides.

“Yes, it is,” said Midori, “but you broke the rules.”

I thought to myself that I had only bent the rules, but arguing semantics with the dead is like divining love from flower petals. Midori repeated her previous sentiments.

Upon uttering the word *broke*, the butterflies disbanded, their little invisible girl-shaped filament dissolving into sparse puffs of incense, like wick lit with a strong flame. They were able to maintain their shape for just a little bit longer before the wind took them away. Midori was able to mouth the words one last time, *but you broke the rules*, before the wind made everything obsolete. She has a one-track mind.

Day 103, meander

As soon as I'm out of eye-shot from the rest of my brothers who rest on stone balustrade crowns in the calm of the early morning sun I take off, sprinting at intervals faster than normal or prescribed; desire can be difficult to overcome at times, especially when you want a little bit of speed behind you, moments momentary, a little mustard in the tank. Not the best usage of my energy, in fact a terrible [EROEI](#) to start the day. Formula One racers and yoke of oxen farmers certainly know better. A hand-cranked spring can provide hours of work if you let it act upon a system slowly, but sometimes the tactile pleasure of holding it against its will, compressing it just so, and then suddenly letting it go to see it jump high is a far more satisfying thing to behold. Today I am that free spring in perpetual bounce, burning through calories right and left, sprinting along the river's edge. I am happy and free as a defenestrated dog, snapping at birds as I pass them, my little pearls grinning and clapping at anything with color and voice. I wish I still had hair, but they keep chopping it short with an army barber's eye for detail. European tennis players from the eighties must have had a blast, darting around the court with their headbands and sweaty locks, their acceleration clearly seen by the geometry of their hair caught in the updraft. There is such a fine line between taking something for granted one day and pining for it the next; maybe that little dichotomy, as seen from a distance, is the purest form of regret.

I finish the riverine portion of my run and head into the forest but decide it best to keep up a little speed; no use lingering, I'm still young and the trees are still green, my legs haven't begun the process of petrification yet. Vinegar in my eyes, vinegar in my tank. Kami, Shinto gods created by everyday people, creep up here & there, manifest through paper ribbons tied around the bases of trees. The thicker the ribbon, the bigger the tree, the greater the Kami. Anything animate or inanimate can be a Kami if it's revered and has space to tie a ribbon around it, I suppose birthday presents are fleeting Kami, and I am fleet of foot, finding sunlight where the forest meets an old road, I...

Decide to sprint along the meandering curves of the Heron's neck, making sure not to physically touch them; the Nazca plateau is not used to much human presence and is very weak against erosion. The necks bends incessantly, I remember it from a point much higher above; why did they need so many runways for such little aircraft? I set my stop watch, lick my finger to test the wind speed and direction despite not being able to read the outcome of this biological computer with any confidence. After a few final stretches, the inverted lotus of yoga, I take off, setting a new world record. I remove my shoes and sprint back the other way, again, a world record in the bare foot category. I run the route again, this time backwards, and crawl back on hands and knees. Buttressing: remnants of my architecture days. I repeated the process with the Condor and the Dog and continued my path halfway around the world along [Hadrian's Wall](#).

Wallsend's Latin signs struck me as charmingly anachronistic and they continued intermittently the entire length of the wall until the town of Browness-on-Solway 135km to the west. Moving with the desire to casually take in the countryside, the journey took four days. The scale of all lands change drastically depending on how you take them in: from a car window everything looks like signs, lights and stops, from a bike seat everything seems like windows and bricks; only when you get on your feet can you *feel* a real human presence. At each daybreak I set out my sleeping bag at an ancient fort perimeter and excavated the dirt around my camp with a collapsible hand trowel, looking for Roman coins. At one location little more than halfway I dug up a golden aureus with Hadrian in profile on one side and what appeared to be a sailor or mathematician on the other. An antiques dealer in London later told me that this coin was minted in celebration of the foundation of Rome, which had already been alive nearly nine hundred years at that time; and to think, Tokyo only became Tokyo after the west rediscovered Japan. I continued along the shoreline and then to Antonine Wall along the central belt of Scotland and moved far to the north, catching sight of Fingal's cave. I traversed the cave without difficulty, humming Pink Floyd, and crept from a tight passage at the other end.

To emerge at the bottom of [Krubera Cave](#), wedged in to the end of the terminal sump with the weight of the Arabika Massif on top of me. Light fragments appeared in the interstitial spaces between water and rock and cold as I felt my way in a vain attempt to make it to the surface some two thousand meters above. I could feel old lines, the nylon cables of mountaineering, left behind, moving past my feet, buzzing as they passed dull edges of rock. One was attached to my shoulders but I was too heavy to be pulled...

And In the darkness of the cave came across visions of proto-humans hunting tiny horses the size of large dogs and huge armadillos like Volkswagen beetles with rudimentary bows and arrows; clothes stitched together with bone fragments, drinking water and taking in wisdom, as if by osmosis, from extra terrestrials residing halfway around the world. Not quite magic, perhaps more of a lost technology, a chemical or hormone or enzyme manufactured someplace far for a specific purpose. And where the Nile and Memphis meet, great buildings constructed from stone designed by a great medical doctor, poet and philosopher; a bucket-brigade of Asians wielding bricks and mortar, building thick and high, flanked on the northern side by disappointed but awe-filled Mongolians, smiling, wondering what the big fuss was about; drinking curdled milk from pouches made of sheep's skin and plotting to take over Europe from their short & bristly steeds. History's first Blitzkrieg, big horsemen riding right through the night, feeding oats to their mounts as they slowly drink a trickle of blood from a cut in the horse's neck, pre-Vlad vampiric, a cycle of sustenance meant to cover a lot of distance in a little time. French heads, pony-tailed, facing down, a ring of white lace and ruffled adornment to the east and rowdy onlookers to the west then a shower of blood, a confluence of trickles starting at the feet and ending with carotid separare. And then, a little man on a big steed relegated to life on a remote island, one of the remotest human habitations, largely unopened to the

Western world, as Emperor Meiji regains power over the Shogunate, bringing to an end two-hundred and fifty years of isolation. Thick, acrid smoke pouring from the coal plants of American ships, industrialization on the open seas, and then empires fall.

My head, resting on a rock, a thick bead of salty blood from my temples finding the corners of my mouth, a few flies spiraling like airplanes queuing to land, a small girl pulling at the loose fabric of my robe. You can only get so much energy out of any system if you only put so much in in the first place. I'll have to be more responsible on future runs.

Day 102, me and her

The Legendary [Musashi](#) was said to have arrived at the secluded island three hours late for his duel with Sasaki Kojiro, paddling up with the sun to his back. Taunted by Sasaki, Musashi ran with full speed, boat oar in hand, which he brought swiftly down upon Sasaki's head, killing him. Pursued by Sasaki's supporters, Musashi returned to his boat just in time to catch the receding tide which carried him to safety as the other's boats were mired in the sand.

All but one of the Forty-Seven Samurai killed themselves in ritual Seppuku. Mishima Yukio did the same after staging a botched coup in an attempt to restore the Emperor's historical powers.

Running will give me time to compile my thoughts, which are more lucid some days than others. Having studied life in all its facets there's one simple thing I'm convinced of: apoptosis. Programmed Cell Death. Even from a cellular level, everything has to die; it's in our genes, built in to us like clockwork, a chemical instinct. The smallest single-celled organisms in the world understand. Without apoptosis the cancers of civilization would run wild, would destroy everything. No, everything will die and everything knows when it has to, recognizes when it has to. I suppose I will die slowly, over the course of the next seven years, from my feet up. In gradual increments my legs will petrify like ancient roots until the top of my head, the very last semblance of my humanity, solidifies as well, and I will be no more; the wind will claim me from a great height. She has died, and did I kill her just for the experience? Poor Midori. No, not poor Midori. Without her I would not end this vicious cycle, I would not find enlightenment. Her death should be remembered as a great thing, not something to run away from. Enlightenment is the subjective sum of life's complete emotion and experience, ying and yang, and she was the final key, the final experience I needed.

Nothing left but all was right.

Day 101, a step back

For the true Gyoja Buddhist, Kaihogyo is a media which carries no message: in fact, running an average of 60km per day over one thousand days is ascetic self denial meant to create a blank state, and in this blank state a Gyoja Buddhist may find enlightenment. Undeniably hard to complete and perhaps nearly impossible, I feel, but enlightenment as nothingness is too easy to define, considering the trials we'll go through. My Kaihogyo is fundamentally different. I define it as a form of media which carries *all* messages, and running's sturdy cadence is the platform I need to build my world, step by step. Enlightenment and the ways one may achieve it are extremely personal.

For me, there is no such thing as *finding* enlightenment, as I've always viewed enlightenment as something *created*: the product of pure imagination that can only be achieved through copious world experience and the creativity to craft, with this experience, the perfect place for the individual self. The esoteric places of the world inspire more creation than others, and I've diligently sourced them since my travels and wanderlust began. I've wandered about Blythe Intaglios, The Hanging Temple of Hengshan, Mount Horeb. I've seen the last tree of Ténéré, the Caño Cristales, the Dead Vlei. I've swam Jellyfish Lake, Xkeken Cenote, and Big Diomedes. I've hiked Mount Roraima, the Salar de Uyuni, and the Capo Testa. My means of enlightenment are not to erase, but create, and before these trials even start I have to admit that my feet are quite old, for it seems as if I've been walking a millennia already. My Kaihogyo will be the binary rhythm of right & left - a definition of self - that acts as the foundation for the creation of my world.

It is with willingness of heart, mind and soul that I should be allowed to complete the rest of the trials. I know the repercussions of failure and am familiar with the tastes of challenge, victory and regret; this is something I must do. If you, Ishikawa-sama, and the rest of the committee will so allow it, I will run and bring honor to Enryaku-ji and all my brothers.

And after you finish the trials and create your perfect world, what will you do?

These trials will see me run a distance equivalent to the circumference of the earth, and having moved forward all I can to arrive at a complete circle, I'll simply take one step back.

Zen Garden Massacre, the second iteration

And Tokyo, her coastline built up from the waste of our ancestors calved like an iceberg and set to drift, piecemeal.

ZGM, the second iteration will be released when the cryptologic puzzles of the first iteration are solved.

On Language & Numerology

An author should never have to explain the words they use to get across a point, unless to a coffee-riddle editor, but I feel that considering the content and challenge posed I should clarify a few things:

1. I have taken some artistic license and changed phonetically similar words for various purposes; sometimes simply because I like the spelling better, but more often than not there is a deeper purpose in these choices.
2. Sometimes the sound of a word (or group of words) is more important than the meaning.
3. I like numbers as well.

Notes on Publishing

For text and image placement I have used Google Docs exclusively. The cover image is hand-stencilled with post processing in Photoshop.

Series & Serious Continuation

I chose to write ZGM in a manner similar to the popular TV series LOST; this is likely very obvious to anybody who has seen the show and read this book. Less obvious are my intentions on where I wish to take this novel (and even *how* I wish to do it). I do enjoy the cryptologic challenges, so while this will be common to each update and iteration, I fully intend on exercising artistic rights throughout the series.

About the Author

If game theory was communism I'd be a pinko, selling dense, frothy books for reasonable prices; a literary barista. I've lived a good life thus far despite completely eschewing all notions of career and most notions of capitalist want yet I *have* worn a suit and consulted for large companies, charging exorbitant amounts; but why? Sincere and utilitarian and wandering transient are sexier. Like many people my age I'm in the process of digitalizing my surroundings and minimizing my negative impact on the world. I'm not religious but consider myself tolerant and spiritual. When I was six years old I asked for (and received) an encyclopedia set for Christmas, and I've never looked back. Friends, family and new experiences are my life's motivating factors, and if I ever see you mistreating your woman, I will hit you; otherwise I'll never lift a lillywhite fist on man or beast.

I'm not half Japanese and I don't live in New York with a yappy lap dog who goes by *Ice Cream*, but I can be reached at the email address provided previously should interest be taken with me or my writing.