

JUNE 2005 - PREMIER ISSUE

# TANUKI

JAPANESE CULTURE WORLDWIDE



INSIDE: Discover Mount Koya, Culture Shock 101, Dragonfly Forge

## From the Editor

Out of the forest of the imagination he emerges, at first slinking belly-down along the earthen floor, then rising to walk on two feet like a man. With craft and cunning, he shifts his shape to survive and never passes up a prank. The seasons turn to years as the world changes around him. Still he watches with a round belly and a jovial grin until the forest vanishes and he stands at the feet of skyscrapers in shop doors watching schoolgirls and salarymen pass him by. He is Tanuki, one of several shape-changing animal tricksters called *henge* (hen-gay), from Japanese folklore. Very old but quick to adapt, he has stood the test of time and remains a beloved symbol of fortune.

Tanuki prove the perfect metaphor for Japanese culture. Like henge, Japan, too, is quick to evolve. Now the nation that birthed the stoic samurai is known as an ultra-modern nexus of pop culture. Yet outside the cyberpunk of the city, and even tucked within its core, the seed of tradition remains. The costumes of Harajuku cosplayers are inspired by kimono and the music of pop idol Utada Hikaru by enka folk songs. Glance down a Tokyo side street to see a century-old shrine still standing.

These contradictions seem to spark a certain fascination among Americans with the complexities of Japanese language and culture. They're certainly what drew me to Japan. But what I knew of its culture was only what I had seen in anime or learned in language classes. I wanted a firsthand experience to see if my American preconception of Japanese life was anything like the real thing. For ten months in Tokyo I lived sink-or-swim but returned amazed, enlightened, and still craving a connection with Japanese culture.

So *Tanuki* magazine was born, for those who seek the hidden places, the new trends, and the lingering traditions of Japan. I hope you enjoy this premier issue, in which we explore the birth and growth of anime in America, the hidden paths of Mount Koya, culture shock for international exchange students, Japanese sword making in America, and much more.

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**On the Cover:** Composite illustration by Stephanie "Chibi" Bajema (Tanuki ©2004) and Kat Ortland

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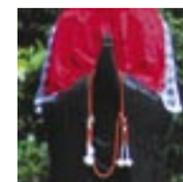
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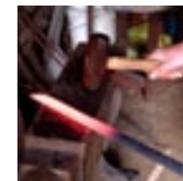
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Part samurai and part cowboy, Michael Bell has made a name for himself as one of America's few smiths of Japanese swords. **by Kathryn Ortland**

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# ハジメマシヨウ Hajimemashō

## Bits, Blurbs & the Best of Japan.

### FRESH BREW, FRESH BREEZE

Travelers brave enough to venture from civilization to the wild depths of northern Okinawa Honto will find a rare treat nestled high in the mountains of Yambaru. The sign for Hiro Coffee farm, on Highway 70 just north of the Fukuchi Dam, seems pleasantly out of place. On this stretch of nearly uninhabited wild land, there are few amenities. Who would expect a coffee stand offering its own beans as fresh brew?

Hiro Coffee, thankfully, is no Starbucks. It's the real thing. From the road, you can see past the café, office, and facilities down into the fields where coffee plants glisten in the morning dew. Owner Hiro Adachi has been nurturing his crop from start to finish for eleven years now, one of only a handful of Okinawan coffee farmers.



He welcomes guests warmly and in perfect English to the tiny shop, which, with two cozy tables and a door that provides questionable protection from the hillside's high winds, more closely resembles a shack than a café. For 400 yen you can get a delicious pot of hot coffee good for several cups and enough to serve two people (or one coffee fiend) quite easily. Hiro will throw in a basket of complementary cookies just to sweeten the deal.

Five dollar cups of acrid Japanese department store coffee pale in comparison with the rich, full taste of Hiro's blend. That it's certified responsibly grown only adds to the ethnic authenticity of this uniquely Okinawan experience. Though it's miles from anywhere, this strange brew is worth a detour.



MTV.com

### HARAJUKU GIRLS

Gwen Stefani seems to be impressed with Tokyo street fashion. In her latest solo album, *Love Angel Music Baby*, released November 2004, Stefani gives tribute to the gothic lolitas of Tokyo Harajuku, even dedicating an entire song to these "Harajuku Girls." MTV.com reports that the artist's spring 2005 L.A.M.B fashion line will include a branch of Japanese-inspired accessories called "Harajuku Lovers" that will feature illustrations of her pint-sized posse. The line's HP digital camera is already popular online.

### DANCE DANCE SHUTTER CHANCE



According to *Wired* magazine, the latest in tech trends from Japan combines *purikura* (print club) photo-sticker booths with Dance Dance Revolution-like action for a funky photo experience. The new machine, called Ulala *purikura*, has a typical 400 yen price tag for one go-round. For the "dance dance" variety, select "DIY pedal course" and rock out to J-pop or American favorites like "Hey Mickey" while pandas dance on the screen. When the electronic voice croons "*shattaa chansu!*" (shutter chance), stomp on the floor pads to take either a close-up or full-body photo. While going solo may be too embarrassing, big groups can end up with smashed feet!

### TAIKO FEVER

America's video game industry has imported— and miniaturized— another Japanese arcade classic. *Taiko Drum Master* for the PlayStation 2 includes two mini *taiko* (Japanese drums) and thick sticks for tapping out the rhythm of a variety of hit songs. The small but entertaining roster of songs in the game can be played single-player or head-to-head with a friend in easy, normal, hard, and *oni* (demon) modes. The winner is the player who accumulates enough points to clear the stage. Though this tiny, well-built home version will never match the sheer entertainment value of giant arcade drums, it comes close to being just as addicting. (\$58.99)



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### GRAND KABUKI SEATTLE

The colorful elegance of Japan's Grand Kabuki Theatre will make a rare appearance in Seattle this June as the centerpiece of the Boeing Dreamliner Arts Festival, a showcase of contemporary art in Asia and the United States. The revered Chikamatsu-za troupe will make two special performances at Seattle's Paramount Theatre before continuing on their first nationwide U.S. tour.

Chikamatsu-za will perform *Sonezaki Shinju*, "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki," a famous piece by the troupe's namesake, playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon. The poetic story follows the doomed love of merchant-clerk Tokubei and his lover Ohatsu as they resolve to die. Also on the program is "Tied to a Pole," a rousing comic dance that stages a poignant contrast with the sorrow of *Sonezaki Shinju*.

Kabuki is perhaps the best known of the Japanese performing arts, famous for elaborate costumes, dramatic acting, and in-depth exploration of human emotion. To create an authentic atmosphere for the exclusive presentation this June, the Paramount Theatre will specially construct a *hanamichi* and custom Kabuki sets.

The eighty members of Chikamatsu-za will bring the play to life with evocative dance and striking poses in the refined kamigata style traditional to the Kansai region. Kamigata forgoes dramatic masculinity common in kabuki storylines and focuses instead on heroes played by gentler *wagoto* actors. Nakamura Ganjiro III, one of Chikamatsu-za's legendary players, is among the few practicing Kamigata actors remaining in modern kabuki. Ganjiro, now in his 80s, will reprise his signature role as the courtesan Ohatsu in *Sonezaki Shinju*.

This will be Grand Kabuki's first appearance in Seattle since the 1990 Goodwill Art Festival, also sponsored by One Reel Productions. The performances mark the beginning of an international warm-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.



June 11 & 12, 2005  
The Paramount Theatre  
911 Pine Street  
Seattle, WA 98101  
Tel. 206-467-5510  
Tickets \$25.50- \$100  
Purchase tickets online:  
<http://www.ticketmaster.com/>



© Marco Lamberto

### HAMSTER HIJINKS

Take everything you ever knew about anime, light it on fire, throw it out the window, and sit down with a strong drink. It's time for *Ebichu the Housekeeping Hamster*. Ebichu is a pert, perky—that's right—hamster, who (guess what?) keeps house. But please, before you lump this series with *Pokemon* and *Hamtaro*, read on. All cute first impressions aside, any seasoned anime viewer will know before watching it that something is amiss with *Ebichu*; it's produced by Gainax. *Ebichu* is one of the few modern Japanese cartoons to be nearly banned from prime-time television for offensive content. No, the series is not pornographic, but with the crude volume of adult humor and sexual visuals in each episode, it comes close. What does a hamster have to do with sex? In short, Ebichu is a diligent and well-meaning critter taking care of her Office Lady master, a woman teetering on the edge of marriageable age and dating a hopeless loser. Whatever hijinks ensue revolve around Ebichu's master's dysfunctional sex life and Ebichu's penchant for perverted blunders. It's worth watching, if just for the horrific shock value.



Illustrated by Alex Swanson

## Pray at a Shinto Shrine

There are thousands of Shinto shrines across Japan, some as large as the goliath Meiji Jingu in Tokyo Harajuku, and many more tiny shrines tucked into neighborhood alcoves. To properly pay respects (or just look like you know what you're doing), follow these simple steps:



Enter the shrine through the sacred gateway, called *torii*, which marks the dwelling of Shinto divinities.

1. First, go to the *chuzoya*, a running fountain with dipping ladles. The water in the basin is used to purify the hands and mouth. Take the ladle in your right hand, dip water and pour it over the left. Then reverse.
2. Take the ladle in your right hand again, and dip water into your cupped left palm. Sip from your palm; quietly rinse your mouth and spit the water on the ground. Rinse dipper and return to original position.
3. Follow the walkway (*sando*) to the *shinden* (sanctuary) and stop in front of the altar. Bow lightly, then approach.
4. Ring the bell to catch the attention of the deity.
5. Toss a coin into the offertory box. Any amount is fine if given with gratitude, though five yen coins are customary.
6. Bow twice, formally and deeply, in respect for the deity.
7. Clap hands twice to again attract the deity and purify your presence through sound.
8. Join hands in front of your chest in the position of prayer.

You may wish to close your eyes and bow your head, or simply make your request in silence.

When you have finished praying, bow deeply once more. Move back three steps, bow lightly, and withdraw.

Lastly, before you perform the above ritual, be sure it's a Shinto shrine you're visiting and not a Buddhist temple. Shrines are marked by red torii or a pair of guardian dog statues at the entryway. Temples lack the gates, but often have posts or buildings marked by the Buddhist character *manji* (卍). The prayer ritual at a temple is much the same with a few critical differences. First, there is no *chuzoya*. Second, and most importantly, do not clap when standing in front of the Buddhist altar. There is no bell to ring as there is no need to summon the presence of the Buddha. Give offering, bow with respect, pray silently, bow again, and return.



## T-SHIRT TRIP-UPS

A tribute to incomprehensible Asian tees likely to embarrass you and your friends. We love 'em; you love 'em. But would you wear 'em?



**Hook-ups "Yellow Fever"** (Zumiez, \$19.99) Japanese culture influenced skateboard legend and designer Jeremy Kline's "Hook-ups" line. Particularly, as he puts it on one shirt, "bitches and sake." Unfortunately Kline wasn't influenced enough to spell-check his half-katana, half-gibberish signature (left). Quick, someone take his temperature! Perhaps this dude's "Yellow Fever" was misdiagnosed.

**J-list "Baka Gaijin"** (jlist.com, \$15.95-\$16.95) Every foreigner who spends time in Japan will become familiar with the phrase "*baka (na) gaijin*," which means, literally, "stupid outsider." So why not label yourself as a pre-emptive strike! Unfortunately, much of the effect of this shirt is lost on Americans wearing it in their home country... where no one can read it and they're not "outsiders" in the first place. Hmm.



**Diesel "Ultra-Violent Sun Block"** (Diesel Jeans, \$19.99) This tee features a classic "Engrish" phrase topped by some whacked-out katakana. Fu...ra...n(?)...che...su...ka. Francesca? Well, it certainly is interesting, if odd.

**Fashion Victim "Anime Junkie"** (Hot topic, \$18.00) Ironically the kanji on this shirt means abso-friggin-lutely nothing in Japanese. We asked our Chinese friend what he thought, and he deduced that the character was the ultra-simplified form of a Chinese kanji that means "junk" or "rubbish." Ahem. Well, if the creators of this "fashion victim" T-shirt were trying be ironic, they've succeeded.



# Ticket Watch

For a small country, Japan has gained great notoriety in a good many things; panty thieves, perverts, and prices, to name a few. It is one of the world's most expensive countries and travel within borders is no exception. However, with careful planning a spendthrift can avoid some of the steepest surcharges. All of Japan's major rail companies offer a variety of bargain buys. But like the country's complex network of rail and subway, these passes are often confusing and may not be what you expect.

When considering discount travel in Japan, always keep universal travel tips in mind. Shop competitively for prices—what sounds too good to be true often is. Before travel, assess what rail lines you will be using and how much normal tickets cost on these lines. Then compare your estimated travel expenses with the price of the discount. Some bargains sacrifice travel flexibility for negligible cuts in cost.

The Japanese government and rail companies have gone to great lengths to make discounts available for almost everyone. Before you traverse the land of the rising sun, check out these offers or visit the ticket services counter, *Midori no Mado-guchi* (see logo to the right), at a Japanese train station.



## Japan Rail Pass

**Who can get it?:** Foreign travelers under "Temporary Visitor Status" to the country. (Read: tourists)

**What is it?:** A pass for free travel on any Japan Rail train and limited JR busses and ferries.

**Cost and duration:** The 7-, 14- or 21-day pass is available as either "regular" or "Green." Duration and type must be chosen at time of purchase and cannot be changed. The Green pass allows travelers use of reserved seat Green cars on limited trains. It's a nice luxury but often unnecessary except in rush-hour travel times. Price for the 7-day pass is 28,300 yen or 37,800 yen (Green); 14 days, 45,100 yen or 61,200 yen (Green) and 21 days, 57,700 yen or 79,600 yen (Green).

**Raves:** Allows travelers free and unlimited transport on the most widespread network of trains in the country.

**Rants:** This rail pass seems comprehensive, but the truth is that Japan Rail doesn't reach every destination. It may not be used on the JR "Nozomi" *shinkansen* (bullet train) or the JR Beetle2 ferry from Hakata to Pusan. Additionally, there are many other non-JR train, subway, and bus lines that do not accept the pass.

**Notes:** Japan Rail is comprised of six independently owned rail companies local to certain areas of Japan. Most of the JR companies offer their own less expensive, localized passes.

## Excursion tickets (Shuyu-ken/ Furi-kippu)

**Who can get it?:** Japanese residents and visitors alike.

**What is it?:** Furi-kippu allow for travel on JR lines to and from a specific destination, such as Hokkaido or Kyushu, and unlimited Japan Rail travel within the area.

**Cost and duration:** Cost and duration vary based on destination.

**Raves:** Excursion tickets are an inexpensive way to travel there and back from a far destination, with five days to a week of free travel in-between.

**Rants:** Excursion tickets are best for travelers with a "home base" and a specific destination in mind. Some flexibility in travel time is recommended. If trains fill up the tickets cannot be applied to airfare.



## "Youth 18" tickets (Seishun juhachi kippu)

**Who can get it?:** Despite the name, this ticket is available to everyone, regardless of age.

**What is it?:** Five one-day tickets that allow for free all-day travel during and around school breaks.

**Cost and duration:** 11,500 yen for five tickets that can be used (roughly) March 1- April 10, July 20- Sept 10, and Dec 10- Jan 20.

**Raves:** Each ticket allows for unlimited boarding and unboarding of any trains during one 24-hour period. You can ride all day!

**Rants:** The "Youth 18" ticket is only good on normal or limited-express trains, so long distance travel will take much, much longer.

## Student discount (Gakuwari)

**Who can get it?:** Students on exchange in Japan for longer than six months with a valid university ID and "resident alien" card.

**What is it?:** A coupon for tickets with destinations of 100 kilometers or farther.

**Cost and duration:** Gakuwari applies 20 percent off long distance tickets for students and can be used 10 times per academic year.

**Raves:** There's no catch. Students can apply for up to four at a time and the coupon is good for three months after it is received.

**Rants:** Students must receive coupons prior to purchasing tickets and coupons may only be used on non-reserved train seats.

# Useful Travel Phrases

What's the fare for \_\_\_\_\_ Station?

\_\_\_\_\_ 駅までの乗車料金はいくらですか?

\_\_\_\_\_ eki made no jousha-ryoukin wa ikura desu ka?

I bought the wrong ticket. What should I do?

間違ったきっぷを買ってしまいました。どうすればいいのでしょうか?

Machigatta kippu wo katte shimaimashita. Dou sureba iin deshou ka?

Where can I get the train for \_\_\_\_\_ ?

\_\_\_\_\_ 行きの電車はどこで乗れますか?

\_\_\_\_\_ iki no densha wa doko de noremasu ka?

Where is platform number \_\_\_\_\_ ?

\_\_\_\_\_ 番線ホームはどこですか?

\_\_\_\_\_ ban-sen houmu wa doko desu ka?

Is this train bound for \_\_\_\_\_ ?

この電車は \_\_\_\_\_ 行きですか?

Kono densha wa \_\_\_\_\_ iki desu ka?

How long does it take? (To get there)

どのぐらいかかりますか?

Dono gurai kakarimasu ka?

## Vocabulary

Ticket- (切符) kippu

One-way- (片道) katamichi

Round-trip- (往復) oufuku

Fare- (乗車料金) jousha-ryoukin

Station- (駅) eki

Train- (電車) densha

Platform- (ホーム) houmu

Station worker- (駅員) eki-in



# CULTURE SHOCK!

## 101

**A**nne Paremter no longer felt at home in her homeland. At 20 years old, the University of Oregon sophomore was overwhelmed by academic and familial obligations. In the spring of 2003, desperate for change, she signed up for a ten-month exchange in Japan the way one might register for the army, eager to see the world and unsure what the future might hold.

Anne went to Japan seeking clarity. Instead, she found confusion. Like most Americans, Anne knew little of what to expect from Japan, beside what she had learned in two years of language study. From the moment she stepped off the plane, surprising details captivated her, from the tangle of power lines above twisted Tokyo streets to the fact that there were Japanese people everywhere.

By losing herself in one of the world's largest metropolises, she had hoped to find direction. But Anne struggled amid the constant flow of the city and the chatter of a still-foreign tongue. As the novelty of *sake*, subways, and strangers faded, Anne's emotions began to fray at the edges.

Her host family, three generations living in a small suburban home, didn't seem to understand her. Their well-meant hand-holding and tediously slow explanations only succeeded in undermining Anne's patience while making her feel incompetent. People on the street talked down to her too, expressing genuine surprise at her slightest attempt to speak their language. Behind her back they gawked, stared, and took pictures. Anne fought her confinement in the role of *gaijin* (outsider) but she couldn't avoid the sudden celebrity her American figure and sandy brown hair, which she had otherwise considered normal, suddenly afforded her. Some days the attention made her feel like a princess, others like a cheap call girl.

**“It was very rare to have a normal day.”**

Five thousand miles away, as fall term 2004 opened at Anne's home institution, 21-year-old Japanese exchange student Chiharu Momoi enrolled in her first American university course. Unlike Anne, Chiharu grew up experiencing the pop culture and politics of her future host nation through movies, music, fashion, and news. She knew the Japanese



### Lost between life & learning:

by Kathryn Ortland

media viewed America as perilously powerful and Americans as overweight, individualistic, and unpredictable. Fascinated by the conflict between Japan's obsession with Americans and its criticism of them, Chiharu sought out the truth. When she entered Waseda University in 2003, she decided to test the mandatory English language education she had received since middle school. She chose political science as her major and headed abroad to experience America firsthand.

Out of curiosity and in preparation for her journey, Chiharu joined an English-speaking bible group in Japan. They told her about the surprises she might expect from America: greasy meat, unsafe streets, and trashy TV. But despite her initial trepidation about danger lurking around every corner, Chiharu has found acclimating to America remarkably easy.



### The conundrum of being a university student abroad

#### Living Abroad, Learning Abroad

Chiharu and Anne are not alone. Every year thousands of students from around the world make their first venture overseas. During the 2002-2003 school year, nearly 180,000 American students studied abroad and the following year, 575,000 international students came to America. According to the Institute of International Education, over half of America's visiting students annually come from Asia. Fourth on the list is Japan, which sends roughly 12 exchange students to America for every one it receives.

The popularity of American university exchange with Japanese students is partially a product of the saturation of Japanese media with American pop culture and partially an extension of Japan's compulsory English education in primary and secondary schools. American

universities are also favorably regarded as some of the most prestigious institutions worldwide. But American students with a cultural or educational interest in Japan are much rarer.

This year, another crop of exchange students will frantically get ready for a term, a year, or longer overseas. But no amount of preparation can train them for the real trial of living abroad: acclimating to a

**“Exchange students face the same stressors as local students: academic obligation and peer pressure.”**

foreign culture. For some, acculturation will be difficult and extended process; for others, a simple matter of a few weeks. Yet even the most seasoned travelers can expect to experience some frustration adjusting to a foreign culture. The awkward transition from outsider to insider—culture shock—can give powerful perspective in a changing world.

International students face many problems, and not all of them are related to being abroad. They must deal with a range of difficulties common to all overseas travelers: insufficient language skills, prejudice, homesickness, and culture shock. But aside from these universal burdens, exchange students also face the same stressors as local students. Namely, academic obligations and peer pressure.

#### Students in a Strange Land

Unlike Anne, Chiharu hasn't experienced much social culture shock, but she has had difficulty adjusting to the American university system. This is her first experience with English immersion in a classroom setting and she finds the workload staggering. Not only that, but classroom expectations are so different from those of a Japanese university that she sometimes doesn't know what to do. Many of her peers, sent from other Tokyo university programs, acknowledge the same difficulties.

In *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, authors Colleen Ward, Stephen Bochner, and Adrian Furnham write that a significant difference in the

expectation of Japanese students and those of their American counterparts lies in classroom participation and student/teacher interaction. “In Japanese classes, the teacher just says everything and the students don’t react,” Chiharu says. Students learn most classroom material by rote and their opinion is seldom asked.

The difference is a reflection of Japan’s hierarchical society and value of group cohesion over individual expression inside the academic institution. In fact, Chiharu has been most surprised by American classroom etiquette, the casual relationship between teacher and student, and the frequency with which students question the information they are taught.

In the vertical society of Japanese business and academia, it is considered rude for juniors (*kohai*) to question the decision of their seniors (*sempai*) and certainly of their teachers. But in America, where

**“No one understands you and you feel humiliated.”**

casual relationships are common even in a professional setting and the strength of the individual is fostered from a young age, it is customary for students to argue their opinion against that of a professor.

According to Chiharu and her friends and peers, Japanese students are free from the rigors of competitive academia once they pass the dreaded university entrance exam. Many just coast through their degree.

“In America we have assignments every day. English is very difficult for me, so, maybe, I sleep for only two or three hours sometimes,” she says, “In Japan, I wouldn’t study so hard. I would probably be out drinking.”

### Mistakes and Miscommunication

Japanese universities, on the other hand, expect a low level of language comprehension and literacy from their foreign visitors. Therefore, few universities provide students with the opportunity to enroll in regular classes unless specifically requested. They instead create a separate English language curriculum for exchange students.



## UPS & DOWNS

### The Phases of Culture Shock

#### 1. “Honeymoon”:

The initial “high” or euphoria at arriving in a new country. The first few days or weeks may seem like a trip to Disneyland.

#### 2. Critical:

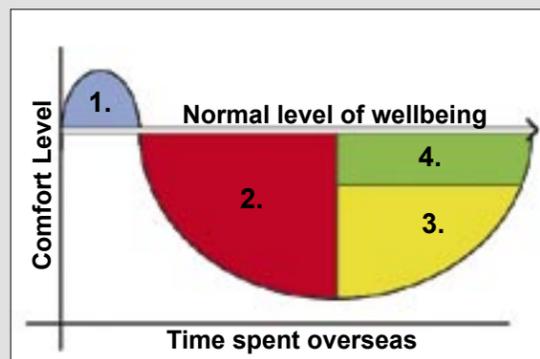
The bulk of culture shock arises from frustration toward everyday tasks which may suddenly seem difficult or impossible. When first adjusting to the “new” way of life abroad, feelings of anger and irritability will often arise toward host nationals or their culture.

#### 3. Understanding and Adjustment:

Previously confusing customs begin to make sense. Though it may still be difficult, daily life is no longer a chore.

#### 4. Integration:

The once “foreign” country now feels just like home. Many students never reach this phase because it often takes years of living abroad to fully integrate.



### 13 Ways to Deal

You can best learn about your host country if you (1) **get to know your host nationals**. It’ll help you to keep from getting down if you (2) **don’t spend too much time alone** and (3) **keep busy, especially with clubs or groups**. Don’t forget, though, to (4) **make time for relaxation**. It can be frustrating, but (5) **expect to be treated as a stereotype** and (6) **allow extra time for everyday tasks**. (7) **Talk with others in the same boat** to relieve pressure but (8) **avoid commiseration**—it will only make you feel worse in the long run. (9) **Do something you’re good at** to remind yourself of your capabilities. If you’re in a rut, (10) **take a trip to a place you haven’t been**, (11) **analyze your thoughts in a journal**, or (12) **write a letter home**. Above all else, (13) **be patient**.

Anne, like most students studying abroad in Japan, was far from fluent when she arrived. She found solace in her English language classes at Waseda University. The Japanese teaching was style a welcome reprieve. But, just as Chiharu struggled with her academia, Anne, too, struggled with a frustrating balance.

“The major thing that was missing in my life in Japan was being good at things,” she says, as she recalls the first day she rode the train alone. Her host father, a tiny man in his 70s, took her from Saginomiya station to Takadanobaba, a seven-minute ride on the Seibu Shinjuku line. At the end of the day, alone on the platform with no one to

**“Japanese students are free from the rigors of competitive academia once they pass the dreaded university entrance exam.”**

decipher the incomprehensible station map, she crossed her fingers and stepped onto the train. Suddenly, her worst fears came true— it was going in the wrong direction! Terrified that she had boarded a non-stop express to the northern island of Hokkaido, Anne fled at the next station. Unable to ask for help, she broke down in tears until a station attendant pointed her in the right direction. She never revealed to her host father the mortifying details of that terrible ride.

“It was very rare to have a normal day. You have a mind blowing day or a ‘the world is falling in on me’ day where no one understands you and you feel humiliated,” says Anne, “It was much more emotionally difficult than I was prepared for.”

### Preparing for Life Abroad

Despite the ups and downs of culture shock, many students either extend their stay abroad or later emigrate to the nation where they were educated. For all the stress Chiharu has endured at the hands of her professors, she’s already considering an American graduate school. And although Anne admits she never quite became accustomed to the Japanese way of life, she has applied to teach English for the JET Program in Japan after she graduates this spring.

In fact, she’s looking forward to her next bout of culture shock. Anne considers an integral part of the overseas experience.

“To be shocked by something means that you’re learning something huge,” she says, “Every shocking experience I had in Japan was positive because it gave me a different insight.” ■



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Design created with character generator at [www.planearium.de](http://www.planearium.de)

## MOST SHOCKING MOMENT



“No matter how hard I looked, I couldn’t find a good cup of coffee or a good American breakfast.”

—Nicole Bretz, 22,  
Waseda University



“Before I came here, I was told never to say the “F” word, under any circumstances. But everyone says it!”

—Yusuke Takanaga, 21,  
University of Oregon



“There were these guys with little white gloves gently cramming people into trains.”

—Tony Kazanjian, 23,  
Meiji University



“In Japan, we never smoke pot. Americans say it’s very usual and they think that pot is better than cigarettes. The Japanese don’t think so.”

—Chiharu Momoi, 21,  
University of Oregon

NESTLED COOL, GREEN, AND GLEAMING IN THE WILDERNESS OF  
WAKAYAMA PREFECTURE, MOUNT KOYA IS ONE OF JAPAN'S GEMS



This mountaintop monastic town is the center of Shingon Buddhism, a sect introduced to Japan in 806 C.E. by Kobo Daishi, better known as Kukai after his death. Despite its remote location and probably because of it, Mount Koya remains a favored pilgrimage site of the Japanese. Women weren't allowed on the mountain until 1872, but these days a train runs from Osaka's Namba station directly to Koya-san. It's an ideal day trip or an even better overnight. The journey only takes two hours, but as the train leaves Osaka and winds further into the mountains, it becomes obvious why Mount Koya was, and still is, a spiritual refuge. Perched high on the side of a mountain valley, the Koya railway line overlooks sweeping panoramas paralleled only by the beauty of the Swiss Alps. From the end of the line, the last few kilometers are by a cable car so steep it's nearly vertical, and by a bus that winds along nauseating curves to the visitor's center.

Three large temple complexes and over a hundred temples, many of them *shukubo*, temple lodgings, now stand in the small mountain town. Many of Koya's population are monks (left). Over 500,000 people make the journey to each year, some pilgrims in earnest, and others tourists eager to escape the sweltering summer heat in Koya's cool alcoves.

Okuno-in, the inner sanctum of Mount Koya where Kobo Daishi is interred, is considered one of the most sacred sites in Japan. At the front of the Okuno-in is the Toro-do, or lantern hall, where 10,000 lamps burn constant flames in memory of Kukai's death over a thousand years ago. The temple is surrounded by Japan's largest graveyard, a vast and

beautiful labyrinth of crumbling tombstones and moss-covered statues best viewed in the glow of early morning or late afternoon. Midnight walks aren't recommended for the faint of heart.

The five-ringed stupas atop many of the tombstones in the cemetery are called *gorinto* (above). From top to bottom, the tiers represent the five material elements of the world: earth, water, fire, air, and space. There is a sixth intangible element, the "knower," that is a reflection upon the self and a concept that synthesizes Kukai's teaching of wisdom and action.

Those who were closest to Kobo Daishi, including pupils, politicians, former feudal lords, and other loyalists are all buried in the maze of memorials. But while one end of the cemetery is a picture perfect artifact, the other is crowded with memorials constructed by modern corporations including Sharp, Toyota and Panasonic sitting atop the graves of prominent business figures and government officials. Believe it or not, there's even a 15-meter-high aluminum replica of the Apollo space rocket.

**APPROACH:**

Local, express and super-express trains leave from Osaka's Namba station on the Nankai Koya line. The trip takes between an hour and a half to two hours and tickets cost 1120 yen with a surcharge for the faster, reserved seat super-express trains.



# inner SANCTUM

the quiet retreat of Japan's Mount Koya

Photographs and text by Kathryn Ortland



## The Garan

Mount Koya's central temple complex was originally constructed by Kobo Daishi. It consists of the Kondo (main hall), Daito (great tower), Saito (western tower), Miedo, and other small temple and shrine buildings.

The Daito (left) and Saito are both rare, two-tiered pagodas that more closely resemble Indian architecture than traditional three-and-five-tiered Japanese pagodas. The Konpon Daito was rebuilt in wood and concrete in 1937 after a catastrophic fire. It signifies the world of action while the Saito denotes the world of wisdom. The Kondo, also rebuilt in the 1930s, represents the union of both wisdom and action, the central tenet of Shingon Buddhism.



## Jizo Bodhisattva

Their eyes are watching from every corner of the Okuno-in graveyard. These sometimes creepy, sometimes cute statues are effigies of Jizo-sama, a most beloved Japanese deity, the patron saint of expectant mothers, children, firemen, travelers, and pilgrims. There may be thousands these crude likenesses nestled among the graves atop Mount Koya, some in groups numbering a hundred or more.

It is not uncommon to see Jizo statues wearing red robes and bibs, like the statue pictured at right, or surrounded by children's toys. This is because Jizo is best known as the guardian of unborn, aborted, and miscarried babies. In Buddhist lore, the souls of these dead children are sent to hell for the suffering they cause their parents, where they are forced for all eternity to build "castles" of small rocks. Jizo rescues them from the torments of demons and hides them in his sleeves so that they may be relieved of their suffering.

## Kongobuji

Kongobuji is the head temple of the Shingon Buddhist sect. It was constructed in 1593 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and is famous for the beautiful painted Japanese doors within.



## Shukubo Lodging:

Though a round trip to and from Mount Koya is possible in one day, the experience is incomplete without an overnight stay. Approximately fifty of the over one hundred temples built atop Koya-san are shukubo, temples that offer lodging and meals to travelers. Shukubo give everyone from religious pilgrims (right) to English-speaking tourists the chance to connect with temple life, an otherwise off-limits experience.

A night's stay is clean and new. All supply a comfy futon (usually with heating pad) and the option of gender separated communal bathing. The meals served at temple lodgings are *shojin ryori*, the traditional vegetarian cuisine of monks. Many shukubo give guests the option of rising at 6 or 7 a.m. for morning prayers or temple cleaning services before breakfast. ■



“ It is better  
to travel well  
than to arrive.”

*-Siddhartha Gautama*

# WHEN ANIME ATTACKS

**"FOR ADULT AUDIENCES ONLY: MUST BE 18 TO RENT."**

But it all looked so innocent! I put *Project A-ko* back on the shelf and picked up *Ranma 1/2*. More of the same. Scanning the few remaining Japanese animation cassettes in the "foreign film" section of my local video store, I felt unsure whether to turn back empty-handed or face the clerk without proper ID. It was 1994, I was fourteen, and my best friend and I had just been introduced to anime via *Sailor Moon* on network TV. We were hooked.

But trying to get anime in '94 was like going on a drug run. We ran into one problem after another. First, we had to convince our parents that *Ranma* wasn't porn (luckily, the video clerk either knew or didn't care). Then, when we tired of renting the same five movies over and over again, we bummed rides off of family members to film societies at local universities where they screened bad fan-subtitled versions of *Dragonball* and *Vision of Escaflowne*. What my young heart would have given for BitTorrent back then!

It's been almost eight years since *Pokemon* battled its way into the American animation scene and took over the market, grossing over \$29 billion in merchandise, videos and box-office revenue. These days, shelves of every Blockbuster are stacked with DVDs of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Cowboy Bebop*, as well as re-releases of classics like *Vampire Hunter D* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Most major multimedia chains stock new movies as soon as they're serialized and shipped from Japan.

You'll hear few complaints from anime aficionados about the industry's swing toward otaku indulgence. But it certainly is baffling. Fifteen years ago there were just two anime video cassettes available in the US, and now Japanese animation is a multi-million dollar empire. Animation companies in America, France and other nations have taken the initiative to create their own knock-offs of anime in an attempt to capitalize on the lucrative craze.

For anime in America, it seems that the sky is the limit. On January 25, 2005, VIZ LLC,



Illustration by Tara Fuller

a prominent distributor of anime and manga in the continental US, announced its merger with ShoPro Entertainment, an affiliate of one of Japan's largest publishing companies. This new, yet unnamed megacorp will broaden the dialogue between East and West, introducing more anime into the mainstream.

But is more always better? Antonia Levi, author of *Samurai from Outer Space: Understanding Japanese Animation*, worries that an oversaturation of anime will homogenize all the things that make it unique.

"I see comics in general, anime and manga in particular, as globalizing pop culture," says Levi. "It's hopeful because people who share

by Kathryn Ortland

childhoods will be able to talk to each other. But will that create blandness?"

In the beginning, anime catered to much more individualized tastes. The first die-hard fans who risked the label of "geek" and embraced the Japanese term for fanatic (*otaku*) paved the way for the anime revolution. Though it's doubtful they'll receive any acknowledgement from today's screaming teeny-bopper fans of TV anime, the first otaku were actually adults. Much like the Trekkies of the 70s and 80s, they were typically white males in their mid to late twenties. And true to the geek stereotype, they were often well-educated and technologically savvy. Only half of today's anime fans are over 20, and many are between 14 and 16 years old.

The reason for the age spread is that anime offers something for everyone. Unlike American cartoons, Japanese animation comprises a wide range of genres from romance to horror and from comedy to pornography.

"We're only slowly getting over that anime isn't just for men," says Levi. Now, Japanese cartoons attract a large following of both girls, who like the super-femmy *shojo* style, and boys, to whom rowdy *shonen* comics and movies are marketed. As the industry grows, *shojo* manga is becoming more and more prevalent.

The first anime introduced in America included classics such as *Astroboy*, *Star Blazers*, and *Speed Racer*. These shows experienced some popularity with a small but loyal fan base, yet never broke into the mainstream—perhaps because they were highly edited to make them "understandable" to Western audiences and lacked much of the sophistication of today's anime.

Levi writes that anime is popular because it uses a few cutting-edge storytelling devices Americans love. First, anime has a high-tech look, and a sleek, polished art style. The setting is given careful detail, even in fantasy worlds and alternative universes.

When it comes to characters, anime certainly has its calling cards. It will never stop overlaying robots, power-suits and mecha, or sexy, powerful, busty women. But even when they fall into a certain stereotype, Japanese storylines are more likely to employ multi-dimensional characters. On top of that, Western



audiences are fascinated by the Eastern convention that bad things can happen to good people, as they often do in anime.

Anime is best beloved, however, for its approaches to unconventional topics. It was in the 1980s, when movies like the cyberpunk classic *Akira* gained a cult following, that anime took root in American soil. Once anime had established itself as a radical medium through its serious treatment of dark, deep, and grotesque subjects, it found a permanent place in the showcase of American cinema.

The "taboo" image of Japanese animation has recently faded but nevertheless opened the door for television series to progress from retro *Robotech* to hip, cutting-edge *Samurai*

Facing Page: Inu-Yasha, Inu-Yasha; Clockwise from left: Totoro & friends, *My Neighbor Totoro*; Pikachu, *Pokemon*; Spike, *Cowboy Bebop*

*Champloo*. In fact, according to Internal Correspondence Version 2 (ICv2), a news source for pop and culture retailers, anime makes up an estimated 60 percent of all broadcast animation shown worldwide.

The success of anime is not limited to TV and video.

The wild marketability of shows like *Pokemon* and *Card Captor Sakura* opened the door for movie

ventures and merchandise spin-offs. In 2003, three anime features, *Pokemon Heroes*, *Millennium Actress*, and *Tokyo Godfathers* all qualified for Oscars. *The Daily Nebraskan* reports that between 1999 and 2002 the industry experienced a 78 percent growth.

With steady climb in anime popularity, the American animation industry has been left struggling in the dust. In response many networks have introduced "Americanime," Americanized anime, in an attempt to create shows that will generate the same kind of interest and profit. The French cartoon (Franime?) *Totally Spies* has gained popularity since it was first aired on ABC in 2001 and picked up by the Cartoon Network in 2003. Even *Teen Titans*, another Cartoon Network show featuring American superhero stars, has taken on an Asian look. Japanese pop group Puffy AmiYumi sings a version of the theme song.

In February, Nickelodeon introduced *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, a show Asian in both style and content. The series is Nickelodeon's first attempt at Asian-influenced animation and follows the story of Aang, a 12-year-old boy with the power to manipulate the wind, as he tries to save his war-ravaged world from bad guys. Creators Mike DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko cite their inspiration in Asian religions, animation, film, and martial arts. According to *USA Today*, the show is aimed at kids 9 to 11 years old but Nick hopes adults, particularly anime fans, will like it too.

Levi doubts that American anime will ever reach the popularity of Japanese animation unless it can

achieve its own innovations. The most successful shows, she contends, are those like *Teen Titans* and *Batman Beyond* that meld our own characters and stories with manga style.

America has yet to take animation seriously and attempt the sophisticated themes and moral ambiguity that make anime universally popular, says Levi. American networks instead invest in live action, which is more expensive and limits plot innovation. So far the most successful U.S. shows that have rivaled anime in form and content have been live action: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, its spin-off *Angel*, and the short-lived DVD hit *Firefly*.

Only time will tell if Americanime will take off or fade into the shadow of the real thing. But it's not likely that the intensity of America's anime craze will lessen soon. With the new VIZ/ShoPro Megacorp set to release loads of new manga and merchandise into the market, anime will gain even more exposure than ever before. Despite its controversiality, the anime and manga boom promotes an active interest in Asian culture. And as any fan will tell you, no matter how wacky or weird, anime is still a slice of Japan, served hot. ■





# Light as a Dragonfly

Story and photos by  
Kathryn Ortland &  
Justin Speyer



One of the best loved Nihon-to smiths makes his home in the Oregon countryside— but this samurai wears cowboy boots.

Just back from a bust, Michael Bell drives his silver Nissan Pathfinder up the steep driveway of his home in rural Oregon, his gun and badge resting on the passenger seat. At 58 years old, lean and graying Bell is in his second-to-last term at the Coquille Police Academy. With his long-legged swagger and western drawl, Bell resembles the classic American cowboy. But he's not in the force for vigilante justice; he's there to practice bushido.

Bell's true passion is *Nihon-to*, the art of the Japanese sword. Since 1987, the rolling hills and valleys of Coquille, Oregon, have been home to Dragonfly Forge and the craftsman Kunimitsu, as Bell signs his blades. Police work is a pastime that allows him to walk the way of the warrior and apply the mental and physical strengths of bushido to his work. As a craftsperson of blades ostensibly for samurai, Bell has taken it upon himself to live the code of a swordsman, and this attention to detail has earned him great recognition for the quality and authenticity of his work.

Perched atop a steep driveway, Bell's residence and studio overlook lush, sweeping fields, a river, and forests. He has set up shop on nearly twenty acres, miles from anywhere, kept company by his wife, Anna; sons Nicholas, 10 and Gabriel, 20; daughter Raquel, 17; two goats, and assorted household pests and pets. Among them are myriad iridescent blue and red dragonflies, creatures famous in Japan for their quickness, lightness, and mystery, and for which the forge is named.

For the last 35 years, Bell has made a name for himself as one of America's few traditional smiths and also one of the finest. At Dragonfly Forge, Bell builds swords from the ground up. First, he crafts his own *tamahagane*, steel formed of sand iron from the Oregon coast. He forges this steel into traditional blades that sell to die-hard collectors for \$16,000 to \$20,000. Bell's own American innovation,

braided cable blades, are second to none in toughness and cutting ability, and sell to "swordsmen" for \$6,500 to \$9,500, depending upon embellishments. His swords are light and efficient, ranging from two to two-and-a-half pounds fully mounted and fitted with handle, guard, and ornaments.

Bell is one of few Americans and even fewer Japanese to sculpt every part of a sword from the *kissaki* (tip) to the *saya* (scabbard). With the amount of time and resources invested in each piece, Bell turns out approximately one blade every month, some taking much longer. He has a waiting list of over a year.

"I'm working at a disadvantage, to some degree, compared to the Japanese," Bell says. "In Japan, the whole process is specialized— the smith doesn't make the decoration for the handle, the guard, the sheath. But in my case people want highly detailed work and I have to do that all myself."

American smiths operate without the infrastructure and support that they might experience in Japan. But even so, Japanese smiths who make a living off their work are rare. Limited by post World War II government regulations, smiths can only produce three long blade and two short blades per month. Of the approximately 350 registered sword smiths in Japan, only about 10 percent are nationally recognized artists for whom smithing is a sole occupation. These are the best of the best, usually the winners of the prestigious yearly competition hosted in Tokyo by the Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Art-Sword (abbreviated NBTHK for the Japanese title).

Yet Bell cannot participate in the competition, or even sell his blades in Japan. The country's strict customs regulations bar the importation of weapons. Even now, 35 years from when Bell began his own



tutelage in San Francisco, there is still a limited dialogue between the Nihon-to craftspeople of the East and West.

Yoshindo Yoshihara, a renowned smith and Culturally Important Person of Japan, has been very supportive of Bell's work. Yoshihara and his American student Leon Kapp, a molecular biologist at the University of California, are working to increase international education about Nihon-to. With this in mind, Yoshihara will open a

"Bell tries to create what the Japanese call an 'all day sword,' a meticulously crafted blade that can be enjoyed a hundred ways as the light of day changes from dawn to dusk."

non-commercial forge in Kirkland, Washington, during the summer of 2005. He also hopes to one day sponsor an international sword competition to rival the NBTHK.

There is a rising hope within the network of American sword smiths that Yoshihara's dream will soon become a reality. The infiltration of Hollywood by "wire-fu" cinema and an influx of anime and Japanese pop culture in major American cities have sparked an increasingly mainstream interest in Asian traditions. The West Coast in particular is the center of gravity for sword work. Back when Bell first started making swords, America's primary interests in Asia were still karate, kung-fu, and Bruce Lee.

As a seven-year-old in 1952, Bell traveled to Japan with his father, the editor of the daily intelligence report for General McArthur. Though he only lived in Tokyo for two years and never studied the Japanese language, Japanese culture made a lasting impression upon him.

Bell bought his first sword in his early twenties while living in San Francisco. He maintained his interest in Japan by working with his hands to build replicas of *tanto* (short swords) and *katana* (long swords) out of scrap metal. At 23, when a friend informed him of an "old man" teaching traditional Japanese sword smithing in Oakland, California, Bell begged for an introduction. Two weeks later he

met Nakajima Muneyoshi, a thin, long haired man with the face and personality of Kurosawa's master swordsman, Kyuzo. Though he had been in America seven years, Nakajima spoke little English and communicated in a pidgin dialect that sometimes only he understood. Bell presented him with a tanto he had crafted from spare parts. Nakajima looked it over, handled the scabbard, nodded, and said "little lacquer OK." With that, Bell found himself apprentice to a master sword smith.

Nakajima, not "old" but in his mid-fifties, had been commissioned by the Japanese Sword Society of California to appraise swords, polish, and craft scabbards for the still-small West Coast community of sword lovers. Nakajima was not only a smith, polisher, and restorer but also had studied and mastered all of the disciplines of Japanese sword smithing. According to Bell, he could take an unsigned blade and identify who made it, when, and where.

When Bell took up residence at the "San Francisco School of Sword Smithing," called "Sokoden" by its pupils, Nakajima had a clutch of five or six apprentices. Most of the students were just checking him out, but a few, including fellow apprentice Francis Boyd, became professional smiths.

There were some Japanese smiths who felt that Nakajima was betraying their craft by sharing his knowledge with outsiders. But Nakajima wasn't ethnocentric. He sensed that the Japanese doubted the serious commitment of American craftspeople, and would teach

anyone with an honest interest who was willing to work long hours for little payoff.

"Much of what I learned was through what we now call 'book learning' but without the books," Bell says.

Students at Sokoden didn't have a Japanese forge to work at, so they struck a deal with the owner of a local blacksmith's forge, and it was there that they did the "dirty work" of smithing— hammering, forging, and shaping blades. Bell worked eight hours every day to express his sincerity, sometimes sleeping at his bench. But Nakajima didn't lavish his pupils with praise. He believed in tough love and snorted, "Not eight hours. Ten hours, fourteen hours, it doesn't matter."

For Nakajima, sword making was life. He was a true sword lover, and more than the business or the craft, he enjoyed the sheer beauty of it all. Though he grew frustrated with his students and kicked each of them out more than once, they knew it was only his way of encouraging them to work harder.

Nakajima was married to his craft, and his apprentices were his children. They ate his food and slept on his floor. Though he chided them for slacking, he would cover them with blankets where they lay.

After five years of apprenticing, Bell struck out on his own and

left the Bay on a commercial fishing boat. Shortly thereafter, because of failing health, Nakajima disbanded Sokoden and returned to Japan. Drinking Maalox for months had done little to cure his stomach pains; two years later he succumbed to cancer.

As if he felt a calling to carry on his teacher's legacy, Bell returned to San Francisco to open a cutlery store on 18th and Dolores, where it still stands today. In 1984, realized his dream to become a full time sword smith and set the plans for Dragonfly Forge in motion. Though he doesn't maintain a Shinto shrine for forge gods or observe the Shinto faith but ceremoniously, Bell constructed his workplace with strict adherence to Shinto ritual and purified the foundation of his forge with a Shinto groundbreaking.

It was a long journey for Bell, an unknown American, to gain recognition as a reputable Nihon-to smith. Once his skill had earned him a reputation on the Internet and among sword collectors, he established a loyal base of customers. Even now, most of the resistance he encounters for making classic Japanese swords is from other Americans, mostly collectors. "I call them 'Nihon-to Assholes,'" says Bell, "They've corked it up so tight they're rigid in their viewpoint."

Several years ago at a San Francisco gun and knife show, Bell displayed a classically built tanto among his other pieces. A customer enthusiastically eyed the blade, asking Bell about the artist's signature. When Bell told him his own moniker, Kunimitsu, the man excitedly showcased the blade to his friend. But after they learned that it was Bell, and not a Japanese smith, who had made the blade only a few months prior, their enthusiasm vanished. "It wasn't the blade that had changed," says Bell, "but their perception of it."

According to Bell, diversity among sword makers encourages smiths to strive for better quality and innovation. He even appreciates any interest the American media might spark in Nihon-to, whether that interest begins with sophisticated blades or purely Americanized Hollywood Ninja swords. In particular, recent movies like *Kill Bill* and *The Last Samurai* have greatly stimulated the market for classic Japanese swords.

"We joke every time someone shows *Highlander* that there's another order in the making," says Bell.



Though the majority of entry-level swords are mass-produced imitations pumped out in Pakistani factories, even a basic curiosity in Nihon-to holds great potential. Many people work their way up the line from cheap knock-offs to real swords, maintaining their Hollywood interest at first through catalogue collections and inexpensive decorative blades and then by commissioning pieces to their own taste through sword smiths. By the time collectors come to Bell, they already have a good idea of his technique and price range.

Whether forging a traditional or cable blade, Bell tries to create what the Japanese call an "all day sword," a piece crafted with such attention to detail that its subtleties can be enjoyed a hundred ways as the light of day changes from dawn to dusk. In many ways he has succeeded; one of his blades took best in show at the 2004 Oregon Knife Collectors Association show in Eugene, Oregon and Bell recently sold a finely outfitted cable blade to a private collector for \$27,000.

But even with 35 years experience as a smith, Bell still makes mistakes. A bucket on the floor of his shop sits stacked full of unfinished



Opening page: Discarded practice blades sit propped against a workbench in the forge doorway

Facing page: A worn pickup sits outside Dragonfly Forge on Bell's property in Coquille, Oregon

Top: A handcrafted guard for an unfinished piece

Left: Bell hammers out a hot cable blade



One salient feature of an excellent blade, wherever it's made, is that it's remarkably light. Americans, in a nation of abundant resources, tend to conceptualize swords as large, heavy, and bludgeoning. But on a rare trip through the vault of the British Museum in the mid-1970s, Bell found that every sword he held, whether Japanese, Viking, or Turkish, was so light that he could balance it on his index finger.

In Nakajima's tradition, Bell has hatched his own clutch of apprentices, to whom he teaches the foundation of smithing. Just as he approaches his work no differently than the Japanese, he asks the same things of his students that Nakajima did of him: hard work, dedication, and resourcefulness. Bell's oldest son Gabriel, too, is a pupil of his father's trade when he is home from Willamette University.

Bell feels a great responsibility to preserve his craft, even if apprentices are a gamble that guarantees no results. He dreams of building an international school with attached dojo on the land near the forge. If Bell's dream perseveres, the American smith will not vanish like the dragonfly, a colorful flit of the imagination, but stand as a lasting icon of intercultural exchange. It is with this in mind that he rises each day to walk the path of bushido— never far from his side, his gun and badge; even closer, his love for the craft that taught him to be a warrior. ■



Top left: Cord binding over rayskin on a katana handle  
Above: Light reflects off a finished cable blade in Bell's studio

practice blades or commissioned swords that didn't come out the way he wanted.

"There's a large learning curve, even with the smiths in Japan," says Bell, "I have relatively few failures at this age, but it's part of the process. You're gonna learn more from your failures than you will from your successes."

Bell is always searching for ways to perfect the forging process and create better, stronger, lighter blades. More than an aptitude for traditional work, it is this penchant for innovation among American smiths that has caught the Japanese eye.

"Though we don't have the same support network as smiths in Japan, we also don't have any of their impediments— the largest of which is tradition," says Bell, "There's certainly now an awareness that we have potential."

Swords crafted in Japan are forged purely of tamahagane, never of bar, cable, or laboratory-made steel. Freedom from government regulation and cultural convention has allowed Bell to experiment in forging his toughest, best selling cable steel blades. Blades like these have earned a reputation for cutting more efficiently than traditional swords, and at about half the price they hold the added bonus of not being a \$20,000 liability.

What makes a good sword, though, is not its price tag, its cutting ability, or appearance. It should be a perfect equilibrium between art and technology, made by a craftsman with what Bell calls an "educated intuition" about beauty, form, and function. Some smiths are artists, who can easily imagine the perfect blade. Some are technologists, who focus on the physics of swordplay: balance, shape, and composition. But the best smiths, Bell says, are both.



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music

**Glay**  
**White Road**  
Toshiba EMI, December 2004  
Review by Erin Gerecke

On first listening to Glay's new single, "White Road," I was rather let down. I'm not yet fluent in Japanese, so I usually hear the music first and process lyrics later. Here, the music itself leaves something to be desired. It has neither the overpowering emotion of "The Frustrated," nor the technical and creative inventiveness of the "One Love" album. The title song has a Christmas-y ring to it that, though unsurprising given the December release date, is still a bit on the smarmy side. The other song on the single, "Egao no Ooi Hi Bakari Janai," is good, but is also rooted deeply in Glay's traditional bouncy, hopeful style, without moving toward invention.

It wasn't until I managed to translate the lyrics that this single seemed worth the 1,000 yen price tag. Classically, Glay releases songs that are well-written but straightforward love songs. Their usual tropes include visions like the heat of a first kiss ("Kuchibiru") or leaving a lover at the airport ("Happiness"). By contrast, the lyrics in "White Road," show a greater depth of knowledge about the experience of love. "This love isn't the first/ and hasn't been the best/ but it's changing to real love/ I think it'll be my last." Wait, you mean a love that's not "the best" can be worth keeping?! This is a huge step away from Glay's stereotypical notions of love, which may indicate a move toward deeper lyrical reflection.

Although hardly Glay's best work to date, "White Road" deserves 3 of 5 stars. It's a good addition to the collection for solid Glay fans, but may not be the best introduction for new fans. If Glay can manage to synthesize the musical style of "The Frustrated" and the lyrics of "White Road," they just might produce their best album yet.



movie

**Banshun (1949)**  
Directed by Yasujiro Ozu  
Review by Rachel Mohr

In Japan there is a practice called *omiai*. It's the traditional form of arranged marriage, in which hired go-betweens and family members select a well-suited couple, introduce the pair for a luncheon, and then fix their union. To Western ears, this sounds like an antique process; but in fact, *omiai* is still very common in Japan, and accounts for up to 30 percent of all marriages.

*Banshun*, directed by Yasujiro Ozu, chronicles just this process. A perpetually smiling young woman (seriously— her wide, fixed grin makes her look like she's got nerve damage or something) named Noriko (Setsuko Hara) cares for her widower father in post-war Japan. Noriko is absolutely content to live with her beloved parent, and enjoys going out to lunch and to the opera with her friends. As this is a Japanese film, her happiness

can't possibly last. Sure enough, her aunt, like any good older Japanese relative, decides that Noriko has to get married— immediately. She sets about insisting doggedly that Noriko find herself a man, and pretty soon both her father and her divorced friend join in the act. The smile slips off Noriko's face as she finds her world inexorably changing, yet she eventually caves in to the wishes of her family and friends. The film ends with her father sitting at home in an empty house peeling an apple. Or at least I'm told that it ends that way; I walked out just before the wedding in disgust.

This film made me remember one thing that I never did understand about Japanese culture: the assumption that your *senpai* (seniors) know what's best for you, and you should follow their wishes above your own. How can you possibly know how to live your own life? Pardon me while I go beat my head against a wall. Yes, this film is difficult for those not used to the "Eastern" style and mannerisms from the 1940s. But for better or for worse, Hara's "unrealistic" acting and annoying mannerisms are probably true to the times.



book

**Kafka on the Shore**  
By Haruki Murakami  
Translated by Philip Gabriel  
Knopf, 2005, 436 pages.  
Review by Chris Pearce

"Kafka on the Shore" is the story of 15-year-old Kafka Tamura who runs away from his father in Tokyo and finds his way to a small private library in Takamatsu, Shikoku. But the book also tells the tale of an elderly, mentally challenged man named Nakata who talks to cats. Nakata travels to Shikoku too, driven by a compulsion to find a special stone. Kafka and Nakata will never meet, but their journey and their lives are psychically linked.

Kafka is a mentally abused boy. When his father wasn't neglecting Kafka, he was taunting him with him and have sex with his estranged mother and sister. In escape, Kafka flees to the library in Shikoku. He is accepted by the quick-witted transgendered librarian and the middle-aged woman who runs the library. They provide him aid and shelter when he becomes wanted

for questioning in connection to the murder of his father. Kafka is Murakami's first teenage protagonist, a change from his usual middle-aged characters. As such, Kafka is slightly unconvincing. Kafka's taste in music and literature are nothing like the typical Japanese teen. In one odd scene, Kafka takes out an old record player and checks the needle to see if it's still good. Perhaps Murakami imagines the average 15-year-old boy to know such things.

The narrative concerning Nakata is more believable because it's written as a complete fantasy. His story stretches back to the Second World War when a mysterious event left him in a coma. When Nakata awakened, he was mentally feeble but able to talk to cats. On the course of his journey he has a run-in with a cat-murdering Johnnie Walker and is responsible for a rain of leeches. The young truck driver he befriends is offered a prostitute by Colonel Sanders, who works as a divine force to move the story along.

Whether or not Kafka has fulfilled his father's prophecy is left up to the reader to decide, along with whether there is any meaning in Nakata's story. There is a positive ending, but because so much else is wrapped in a mystery, "Kafka on the Shore" is an entertaining, but not great, book.

My recommendation: Wait for the paperback.

## SUSHI, FRESH AND FAST

Philadelphia. Crop Burning. Rock n' Roll. Surfs Up. Sound like a flashback into an American history textbook? Nope, think again and think Japan. All of the above are names for sushi rolls. Give or take the raw fish, Americans love sushi. Low fat, low calorie, chock full of nutrients and savory taste, sushi has sparked a craze across the country.

Primitive sushi, called *Narezushi*, was created over a thousand years ago to preserve food in pre-refrigeration days. It was made by pressing cleaned, raw fish between layers of salt and rice, which preserved the fish for several weeks. Modern sushi didn't evolve until the 1900s, when a chef named Yohei made Narezushi without fermenting the ingredients first.

Today, sushi exists in four forms: *maki*, a roll with rice and seaweed wrapped around the outside; *nigiri*, thin slices of fish over hand-formed balls of rice; *te-maki*, giant cones of nori filled with fish, rice, and veggies; and *sashimi*, plain fish with no rice.

Sushi has grown from an obscure foreign delicacy for the strong-of-stomach to a hip, trendy supermarket snack. It has become almost as American as apple pie. Western sushi tends to be bigger than its Japanese counterpart, a gigantic mouthful sometimes stuffed with eclectic ingredients. The names of the rolls above are just a few of those created on American soil. Some, like the popular California Roll (crab, avocado and cucumber), have made their way back to Japan in an example of a bizarre, cross-cultural food exchange.

Do Americans favor quantity over quality? Presentation over palatability? *Tanuki* staffers took the initiative to sample some of the maki and nigiri available at West Coast supermarkets to find out if the hippest, most mainstream sushi makes the grade. Sushi was rated 1 through 5 in the following categories: general freshness, rice consistency/texture, fish quality/texture, size/shape, and price/variety. Here are our results:

### PC MARKET of CHOICE (Eugene, OR)

**Freshness: (4 of 5)** Made fresh daily at a mini sushi stand, but may sit out for hours. The cucumber in the roll was still crunchy when we got it!

**Rice: (3 of 5)** A decent flavor and texture, though sweeter in the maki than the nigiri.

**Fish: (3 of 5)** The fish is unimpressive and rubbery in the nigiri but works well in maki.

**Size/ shape: (4 of 5)** Maki are abnormally large and nigiri slightly small.

**Price and Variety: (3 of 5)** PC Market offers a good but pricy variety, with most rolls ranging from \$5 to \$8 and nigiri from \$8 and up. Restaurant sushi costs the same and tastes better.

**Overall: (17 of 25) B**



### WHOLE FOODS (Seattle, WA)

**Freshness: (4 of 5)** Made fresh daily, but may sit out.

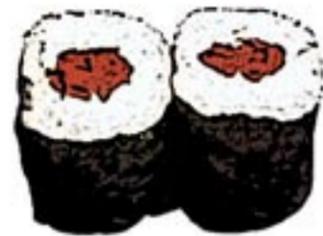
**Rice: (4 of 5)** Has a nice texture and pleasant, sweet taste. It might be better fresher but it wasn't too soft or dense.

**Fish: (3 of 5)** While reasonably firm, the fish lacks distinguishable flavor.

**Size/ shape: (4 of 5)** Nigiri were a bit small and maki a bit large.

**Price and Variety: (4 of 5)** Whole Foods sells a basic set of traditional sushi with average prices from \$5 for a basic roll to \$12.95 for a large combo. They also create custom party platters by request, but they're rather expensive.

**Overall: (19 of 25) B+**



### UWAJIMAYA (Seattle, WA)

**Freshness: (4 of 5)** Made daily but may sit out.

**Rice: (4 of 5)** The glutinous rice in the rolls hints at over-refrigeration but has a nice, slightly sweet taste in general.

**Fish: (3 of 5)** Uwajimaya's fish is variable, ranging from well-textured to leathery and fibrous. It's a hit and miss.

**Size/ shape: (5 of 5)** Neither the rolls nor the nigiri are too large or too small. Most nigiri have nice, broad cuts of fish.

**Price and Variety: (5 of 5)** This Asian market sells almost everything, from Unagi rolls to combo nigiri platters. Prices range from \$3.50 for basic rolls to \$12.50 for some nigiri/maki combos. A fitting price range for superior supermarket quality.

**Overall: (21 of 25) A-**



### TRADER JOE'S (Portland, OR)

**Freshness: (1 of 5)** Joe's sushi is packaged to last three days— that means soggy ingredients.

**Rice: (1 of 5)** Bland, squished into mush, and hardened from over-refrigeration. BLECH.

**Fish: (2 of 5)** Because of the three day "time limit," Joe's uses no raw fish. Even with a lack of traditional sushi they score a few points for innovation. We were intrigued by maki with real Alaskan Blue Crab, and cooked Halibut with ponzu sauce, but not impressed by the flavor of the variations we tried.

**Size/ shape: (5 of 5)** Despite icky rice, and so-so ingredients the size measures up.

**Price and Variety: (3 of 5)** An interesting and affordable medly. Rolls start at around \$3.00 for eight pieces, and a combo platter with three pieces each of three types of crab maki and a veggie roll, plus four pieces of cooked shrimp nigiri was only \$4.99. The price is right, but you get what you pay for.

**Overall: (12 of 25) C-**

## Recipe

### NIGIRI

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 4 cups rinsed sushi rice
- 4 cups water
- 1/4 cups rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1/4 cups sake or mirin (optional)
- 4" piece Konbu seaweed (optional)

#### SUSHI RICE:

In a saucepan, bring rice, water and kelp almost to a boil with the lid on. Remove kelp (reserve for other uses), return lid, lower heat and simmer an additional 20 minutes. Remove from heat, and let stand, covered, for 10 more minutes. If using rice cooker, follow directions.

Blend vinegar, sake, salt and sugar in a separate bowl. Turn rice out in a wood or porcelain bowl, and slowly and evenly drizzle dressing over rice. Stir with wooden spoon. Using a spoon or spatula, spread the rice over a tray, no more than 1/2 inch deep. Cover loosely with saran wrap and cool until room temperature.

#### CUTTING FISH:

Purchase sashimi-grade tuna, salmon or other fish from a reputable local seafood market. Keep the fish chilled in the fridge for no more than a day. Do not freeze.

Prepare a santoku or sharp kitchen knife for filleting the fish. Cut the fish diagonally toward the end of the fillet, pressing downward in one clean motion. Do not saw. While cutting, do not press on the fish or handle it more than necessary. Slices should be less than 1/4 inch thick.

#### SHAPING NIGIRI:

Moisten hands with water. Grab about half an ounce of sushi rice. Form it into a bite-sized cylinder with your hands but don't pack it too tightly.

Use two fingers to pick up chilled, sliced fish. Avoid touching it too long, as it can absorb body heat very quickly. Press fish gently into rice between thumb and forefinger. Serve immediately.



## Natsume Soseki's Ten Nights and Dreams

### The First Night

translated by Chris Pearce

*Ten Nights and Dreams is a collection of ten short stories written by celebrated Meiji period author Natsume Soseki. It was first published in Japan in 1908 under the title Yume Jāya (夢十夜). The stories are thought by some to be a written account of Soseki's actual dreams. A Japanese version follows this excerpt.*

I had this dream.

As I was sitting with my arms folded by her pillow, the woman lying on her back said in a quiet voice that she would die. Her long hair covered the pillow and the soft outline of her oval face lay down inside it. Deep in her pure white cheeks was a slight flush the color of warm blood. The color of her lips was, of course, red. She didn't possibly look like she could die. But clearly, she had said in that quiet voice that she would soon die. Naturally I thought "Don't die." Then I peered down into her from above and asked, "Is that so? You're going to die soon?"

"I will die," she said as she opened her eyes wide. They were large, moist eyes. Wrapped in long lashes was a mere surface of pure black. In the depths of those pure black pupils my form floated vividly.

I gazed at the luster of those dark pupils, so deep they were almost transparent, and thought, "Even so, could she die?" Gently, I brought my lips to the side of her pillow and said, "I don't think you're going to die. I'm sure everything's fine." Her sleepy black eyes opened wide, she then said in that same quiet voice, "But I will die, there's no escaping it."

"Can you see my face then?" I asked intensely.

"Can I see? There, in there, it's being reflected isn't it?" she said, showing me her smile. I fell quiet, and withdrew my face from her pillow. With my arms folded, I wondered if she would die after all.

After a time she again spoke, "When I die, please bury me. Dig a hole with a large oyster shell. Then take a fragment of a star that has fallen from heaven and place it as a grave marker. And then, please, wait by my grave because I will come back to see you." I asked her when she would come back.

"The sun rises, doesn't it. And then it sets. And doesn't it then rise and set again — the red sun goes from east to west. While it falls from east to west — can you wait?"

I said nothing and nodded. The quiet tone of her voice rose and she boldly said, "Please wait one hundred years.

"Please sit and wait by my grave for one hundred years, for

without fail I will come back to see you."

"I'll just be waiting," I replied. Then the form that I saw clearly in her black pupils started to faintly come apart. Like still water that moves and disturbs a reflection, she thought it would leak out and snapped her eyes shut. From between her long eyelashes tears trickled down her cheek — she had died.

After that I descended to the garden and dug a hole with an oyster shell. It was a large shell, with a smooth, sharp edge. With each scoop light from the moon would sparkle on the back of the shell. There was also the smell of moist earth. A hole was hollowed out after some time. I put her in there. Then I gently scattered soft earth from above. Each time I scattered the earth, light from the moon shone on the back of the oyster shell.

Then I picked up a fragment of star that had fallen and gently set it on top of the earth. The fragment was round. When it had fallen through the heavens, I thought, the corners must have come off and it became smooth. While I was lifting it up in my arms and placing it on top of the earth my chest and hands became a little warmer.

I sat on moss. I folded my arms and stared at the round grave stone, all the while thinking about how I would be waiting like this for the next hundred years. Soon, just like she had said, the sun appeared from the east. It was a large, red sun. And again, just like she had said, it soon fell to the west. Just as red, it suddenly fell away. I counted one.

I waited a while and again the crimson sun slowly started to rise. Then it quietly sank. Again I counted, two.

I wasn't sure how many times I saw the red sun while I was counting one and two this way. A nearly inexhaustible number of red suns passed over my head no matter how many I counted. But even so, a hundred years would still not come. At last, I stared at the round rock covered in moss, and the thought that she might have deceived me came to mind.

Just then, from under the rock, a green stem started to stretch out diagonally toward me. I watched as it grew longer, until it stopped around my chest. I thought it had stopped, but at the top of the smoothly swaying stem, a single long, thin bud, slightly bent, softly opened its petals. A pure white lily at the tip of my nose gave off a fragrance that seeped into my bones. From far above dewdrops fell, causing the flower to waver unsteadily under its own weight. I moved my head forward and kissed the white petals dripping wet with cool dew. At the moment I pulled my face from the lily, unthinking, I looked at the distant sky and a single morning star was twinkling.

This was the moment I first realized that one hundred years had finally passed.

### 夢十夜 “第一夜” (夏目漱石)

こんな夢を見た。

腕組をして枕元に坐っていると、仰向に寝た女が、静かな声でもう死にますと云う。女は長い髪を枕に敷いて、輪郭の柔らかな瓜実顔をその中に横たえている。真白な頬の底に温かい血の色がほどよく差して、唇の色は無論赤い。とうてい死にそうには見えない。しかし女は静かな声で、もう死にますと判然と云った。自分も確かにこれは死ぬなと思った。そこで、そうかね、もう死ぬのかね、と上から覗き込むようにして聞いて見た。死にますとも、と云いながら、女はぱっちり目を開けた。大きな潤いのある眼で、長い睫に包まれた中は、ただ一面に真黒であった。その真黒な眸の奥に、自分の姿が鮮やかに浮かんでいる。

自分は透き徹るほど深く見えるこの黒眼の色沢を眺めて、これでも死ぬのかと思った。それで、ねんごろに枕の傍へ口を付けて、死ぬんじゃなからうね、大丈夫だろうね、とまた聞き返した。すると女は黒い眼を睨そうにみはったまま、やっぱり静かな声で、でも、死ぬんですもの、仕方がないわと云った。

じゃ、私の顔が見えるかいと一心に聞くと、見えるかいて、そら、そこに、写ってるじゃありませんかと、にこりと笑って見せた。自分は黙って、顔を枕から離れた。腕組をしながら、どうしても死ぬのかなと思った。

しばらくして、女がまたこう云った。

「死んだら、埋めて下さい。大きな真珠貝で穴を掘って。そして天から落ちて来る星の破片を墓標に置いて下さい。そして墓の傍で待っていて下さい。また逢いに来ますから。」  
自分は、いつ逢いに来るかねと聞いた。

「日が出るでしょう。それから日が沈むでしょう。それからまた出るでしょう、そしてまた沈むでしょう。赤い日が東から西へ、東から西へと落ちて行くうちに、あなた、待っていられますか？」

自分は黙って頷いた。女は静かな調子を一段と張り上げて、

「百年待っていて下さい」と思い切った声で云った。  
「百年、私の墓の傍で坐って待っていて下さい。きっと逢いに来ますから。」

自分はただ待っていると答えた。すると、黒い眸のなかに鮮やかに見えた自分の姿が、ぼろりと崩れて来た。静かな水が動いて写る影を乱したように、流れ出したと思ったら、女の眼がぱちりと閉じた。長い睫の間から涙が頬へ垂れた— もう死んでいた。

自分はそれから庭へ下りて、真珠貝で穴を掘った。真珠貝は大きな滑らかな縁の鋭い貝であった。土をすくうたびに、貝の裏に月の光が差してきらきらした。湿った土の匂いもした。穴はしばらくして掘れた。女をその中に入れた。そうして柔らかい土を、上からそっと掛けた。掛けるたびに真珠貝の裏に月の光が差した。

それから星の破片の落ちたのを拾って来て、かるく土の上へ乗せた。星の破片は丸かった。長い間大空を落ちていた間に、角が取れて滑かになったんだろうと思った。抱き上げて土の上へ置くうちに、自分の胸と手が少し暖かくなった。

自分は苔の上に坐った。これから百年の間こうして待っているんだなと考えながら、腕組をして、丸い墓石を眺めていた。そのうちに、女の云った通り日が東から出た。大きな赤い日であった。それがまた女の云った通り、やがて西へ落ちた。赤いまんまでのっ落ちて行った。一つと自分は勘定した。

しばらくするとまた唐紅の天道がのそりと上って来た。そうして黙って沈んでしまった。二つとまた勘定した。

自分はこう云う風の一つ二つと勘定して行くうちに、赤い日をいくつ見たか分らない。勘定しても、勘定しても、しつこいほど赤い日が頭の上を通り越して行った。それでも百年がまだ来ない。しまいには、苔の生えた丸い石を眺めて、自分は女に欺されたのではなからうかと思いついた。

すると石の下から斜めに自分の方へ向いて青い茎が伸びて来た。見る間に長くなってちょうど自分の胸のあたりまで来て留まった。と思うと、すらりと揺ぐ茎の頂に、心持ち首を傾けていた細長い一輪の蕾が、ふっくらと弁を開いた。真白な百合が鼻の先で骨に徹するほど匂った。そこへ遥か上から、ばたりと露が落ちたので、花は自分の重みでふらふらと動いた。自分は首を前へ出して冷たい露の滴る、白い花弁に接吻した。自分が百合から顔を離す拍子に思わず、遠い空を見たら、暁の星がたった一つ瞬いていた。

「百年はもう来ていたんだな」とこの時始めて気がついた。

## Sore mo jinsei

Sore mo jinsei- Erin Gerecke





The TANUKI is a clever character from Japanese folk history. Its namesake is a real, raccoon-like animal known for cunning and survival skills. Like the fox, the mythical tanuki can shapechange, usually by placing a leaf upon its bare head. Tanuki often turn into monks or teakettles and play pranks on unsuspecting woodsmen and hunters. Today, statues of Tanuki beckon customers into restaurants, garbed in the robes and hat of a wandering monk, with sake in one hand and a false promissory note in the other.