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hyogo times

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Niigata Reflections

Driving

Hey, Awaji's Got Monkeys!



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All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, musings, poetry, prose and any ideas to improve the Hyogo Times for the betterment of the Hyogo JET community.

Submit by the 15th of each month to:
publications@hyogo.ajet.net

Message from the Editor

Hi Hyogo!

Spring is on the way, and have we got an issue for you. This month's Hyogo Times is full of various media- and other reviews (books, movies, music, restaurants, and more!), some great info on places to see both within Hyogo and beyond it, some interesting reflections on love, culture, and life, as well as a call to action for those JETs who currently drive with an international permit and have re-contracted for a second year. Something to make you laugh, and something to make you think.

We're still looking for a few more good writers, especially for English Sensei Spirit, and for some regional correspondents (check out the regional section for more information), and of course, as always, we welcome your thoughts, one-shot articles, poetry, prose, and photography for possible inclusion in future issues.



Useful information

HYOGO PAs

078-362-3026

Mail: hyogo_pa@yahoo.com

URL: www.hyogoajet.net/wiki/Living_Guide

JETLINE

03-5213-1729

Call the JETLINE and talk to a CLAIR Programme Coordinator about anything you like. We are former JETs, and can answer most questions regarding the programme, and will try to help with any issues or questions you have regarding the workplace, or life in Japan. Hours are Monday – Friday, 9am – 6pm Japan Standard Time.

This month I'm especially looking for stories, advice, and other information aimed at passing the driving test in Akashi, to publish in April!

Oh and a successor. I'm looking for one of those, too. Takes a special person to captain this ship, it does!

Peace out yo,

Lemmon



(picture credit: A. Hartland)

AJET PSG

050-5534-5566

Need to talk? Call the AJET Peer Support Group, a free, anonymous listening and referral service for JETs by JETs, every night of the year from 8pm – 7am.

TELL (Tokyo English Life Line)

03-5774-0992

Call the Life Line for free, anonymous, and confidential telephone counseling from 9am to 11pm, 365 days a year. Trained volunteers can offer counseling and support, as well as information on a broad range of English-speaking services in Japan.

Message from the PR

Hey there Hyogo

Welcome to March!

To me, it's the beginning of a long season of flowers and flower-related things. Plum blossoms pop up (and make gardens smell like cinnamon gum!), Hina matsuri takes over all the temples and the stores until White Day, when the stores switch back to their Valentine's Day CDs (cheapskates!). To AJET councils all over the country March is even more important, because it means something else besides digging up the one green item you have in time for St. Patrick's Day events. It's council changeover time; if you're interested in

getting involved, this is the time for you to blossom! ^__^

Prefectural AJET chapters provide social networks for JETs through social, charitable, and cultural events to encourage interaction and communication with each other as well as our local communities. We're eager to start something up once sakura season rolls in (that's right, I'm **still** talking about flowers!). If you'd like to join the council or you'd like some more information, don't hesitate to let us know at pr@hyogo.ajet.net.



We're looking for a few new buds!

There, I'm done. It had to be said.

Peace out,

Sifton



Hyogo Prefectural Advisors

Liz

A second-year CIR from Seattle, USA.

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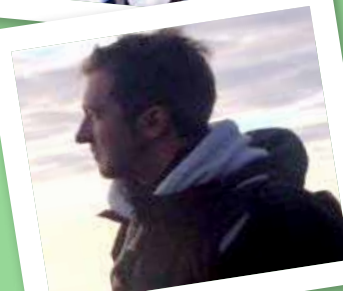
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Looking forward to hearing from you!
We'd like to know how you're doing.



Okayama Naked Man Festival

18 Feb 2012. Photos by Jon Burroughs.

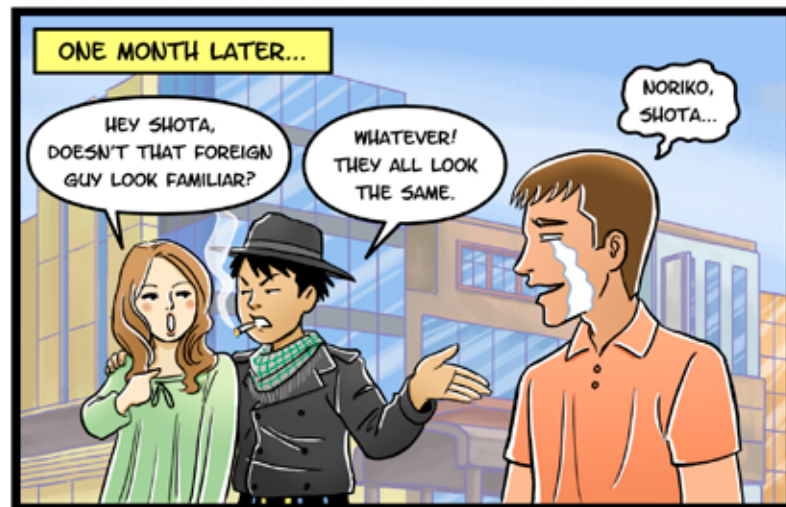
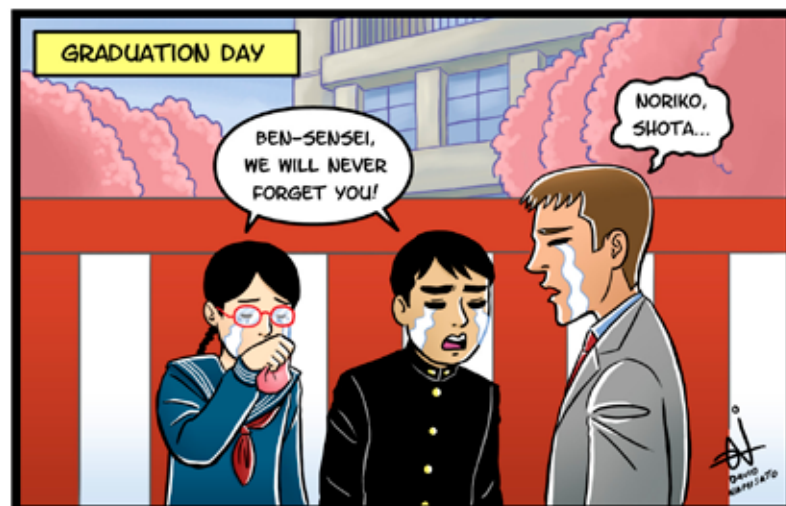


Feature

Hehe...

Life After the B.O.E.....

By David Namisato



They grow up so quickly.

David Namisato is an illustrator in Toronto, Canada, and a former CIR (Aomori-ken, 2002-04).

David recently released the *Life After the BOE book*! Check it out, along with more *Life After the B.O.E.* comics at his [website](http://www.lifeaftertheboe.com)!



www.lifeaftertheboe.com

洒落

Paul Schuble's

I-word play

犯人に
間違われた人
はマンション
の何階に
住んでいる？

Answer: ごかい (the fifth floor)

This riddle asks, "Which floor does the man who was mistaken for a criminal live on?"

The answer is another product of some clever word play. 「ごかい」 has multiple meanings in Japanese, one of which is "5th floor" (5階). Another possible meaning is 「誤解」, which means "mistake" or "misunderstanding."

Travel Japan!



Snow Bound
Nozawa Onsen.....



Snow Bound; Nozawa Onsen

Think of skiing in Honshu,

and most of us would think of Hakuba or Shiga Kogen. Located further north in Nagano lies Nozawa Onsen Ski Resort, one of the oldest ski resorts in the country. The slopes run from the very top of Mt. Kenashi, peaking at 1650 metres, to its base. The abundance of fresh snow in the region creates perfect conditions for both skiers and boarders alike well into early May.

According to the other travelers in the area, Nozawa is a boarder's mountain. There are heaps of places to drop off-piste and enjoy the fresh powder. If you do drop off-piste, you may just come across the Japanese serow (a goat-antelope), or a Japanese macaque. The Snow Park is located to the right of the Uenotaira run and provides jumps and half pipes for the more adventurous.

However, skiers need not be worried: most of the green runs are better suited to two planks than one; you'll occasionally see a skier giving their boarding companion a tow. During my stay we had a fair dumping of snow and a white out on the first day, but this just meant an endless supply of fresh powder! When the sun shines through, you can see as far as the Japan Sea over the Japan Alps from up on the hill.

While the last Nagasaka gondola is 4:00pm, and the last Hikage gondola is 4:20pm, most nights you can continue on the night run for an extra ¥1,500. It is accessed by the Nagasaka four lift. Slope side, there are many restaurants to choose from for coffee, cake, and the obligatory lunch/beer session.

A 7 minute walk from the ski lifts and in the centre

of Nozawa town, Lodge Matsuya is little mid-range accommodation run by a lovely family, who often also help out the local ALT. The rooms are nice and big (go for a Japanese style room) and charge per person, so you can spread out between rooms if you have a larger group. Should you have any questions or requests, nothing seems to be too much trouble for the Matsuya family. During peak times, you can get a room for ¥6,000 per person (¥5,000 for Sundays and weeknights), and if you take your own car, you can marvel at the lodge manager's car tessellation prowess in their rather narrow parking lot.

Tomii Rentals, located opposite the Nagasaka Gondola, will set you up with all your gear needs and even give you a small discount if you stay at Lodge Matsuya. Although their rental policy says to have rentals back

by 5pm on the last day of hire, they aren't so strict and will let you take them on to the night run if you just let them know ahead of time.

One of the other marvels of Nozawa Onsen is the abundance of free natural sulfurous hot springs throughout the town. There are 13 in total, so just take your own toiletries, clean off, and jump in if you can. The local Obachans make it look like a walk in the park, but the scalding natural waters will leave your skin very pink. Try O-yu, where there are 2 baths, and in the ぬる湯 bath you can turn on the cold water tap to get a little relief.

If you just can't get enough of those Hot Spring Monkeys, tours run from Nozawa Onsen Resort to the Monkey Park (Located close to Shiga Kogen Ski Resort). Just inquire at your accommodation for tours and

pricing. The monkey park itself is only ¥500 for admission, so if you can make it out there yourself, it won't cost you the earth and is well worth a look.

So now that you're pumped for the fresh powder snow and onsens of Nozawa Onsen, how to get there? The cheapest and easiest way to get to the ski hills is the old night bus. Buses range from normal to sleeper and can be booked online at www.ski-e-bus.com/kansai-nozawa/index.html. Prices start from ¥5,700 one way and from ¥11,000 return. By train, Nozawa Onsen is a little difficult to access: from Shin Osaka station to Nagoya station takes 3 hours and 2 transfers (¥11,670 one way), then you'll need to switch to a limited express bus to take you into Nozawa (¥1,400 one way), which will take another 75 minutes. By car, Nozawa Onsen is a 20 minute drive from the Toyota Iiyama IC, but it takes around 7 hours

to get there from Kansai, so be sure to bring alternate drivers.

Tips

Monkeys cause quite a lot of mischief in the area, so should you decide to use your balcony as a 'fridge', make sure you use a proper zip up bag to avoid its contents being stolen by these tricksters.

To avoid the long line for the Nagasaka Gondola on a weekend morning, take the Nagasaka triple and drop down into Hikage station instead.

If you plan to drive, make sure you have good snow tyres. The access roads in winter can be very, very slippery, so good tyres are not optional. If you can, 4WD is best, though you can get by with front wheel drive.

Jess Grigg



Maigo in Hyogo

Last month's Maigo was Sumadera Temple, correctly guessed by Matt Stott. The left statue's character is Taira no Atsumori (killed young boy), and the right statue is Kumagai Naozane (Later: turned into Buddhist monk). Anyway, on to this month! **Where in Hyogo can you find these scores of immobile soldiers standing at attention?**

Regional Correspondence

Hyogo, as one of the largest and most JET-filled prefectures in Japan, may be more easily taken in when broken down into its six main regional sectors. These regions are Kobe, Hanshin, Harima, Tajima, Tamba, and Awaji. In the future, we'll be running columns for the regions in which we have regional correspondents.

Kobe

Kobe City is where a lot of the action is in Hyogo. Though we don't have a designated Kobe correspondent, we do have stories and reviews from out of our capital city quite frequently.

Hanshin

This is the most populous and citified area outside Kobe City itself, comprised of Takarazuka, Amagasaki, Nishinomiya, Ashiya, Itami, Kawanishi, Sanda, and Inagawa.

Harima

Located to the south and west, Harima is the largest region size-wise. It is comprised of Akashi, Kakogawa, Nishiwaki, Miki, Takasago, Ono, Kasai, Kato, Taka, Inami, Harima (town), Himeji, Aioi, Tatsuno, Ako, Shiso,

Fukusaki, Kamikawa, Ichikawa, Taishi, Kamigori, and Sayo. I will contribute a bit for Harima ("Harima Happenings"), but as it's such a large area, I would love to add a second correspondent!

Tajima

Located on the north (Japan Sea) coast, this area has Toyooka, Kami, Shin-Onsen, Yabu, and Asago.

Tamba

Tajima, tucked up against Kyoto Prefecture, is made up of Sasayama and Tamba.

Awaji

Awaji Island is comprised of three parts: Sumoto, Awaji, and Minami-Awaji. Check out "Big Things on Little Awaji" from our Awaji correspondent Veronica Chung.

Each of us lives in some corner or other of this sprawling prefecture, and sometimes we're privy to little gems of sightseeing, eating, or other experiences that JETs just fifteen minutes away don't have any idea about! If you would like to share something about your area,



whether as a regular dedicated correspondent or even as a one-shot post, get in touch with us, and we'll connect our fellows with your find!

www.hyogo-tourism.jp/english/area/index.html has an interactive map of the regions with some highlights of each.

Emily Lemmon

The map is from the Hyogo AJET wiki (www.hyogojet.net/wiki/File:HyogoMap-English.GIF), colored in by me. <3

Harima Happenings

In the north of Harima, March will be your last chance to catch skiing times at ski-jous like *Chikusa Kogen*, and ski or board action at *Tokura Banshu* in the north reaches of Harima area.

But as the snow melts, the flowers are blooming in south Harima! Cherry blossoms are famous all over the world, and with good reason, but their cousins the plum trees shouldn't be overlooked.

In Harima, there are two recommended spots for checking out plum blossoms. One is the *Kokoen Garden*, near the castle in Himeji. It's a 15 minute walk from Himeji station, or a 5 minute bus ride. Admission is ¥300, and hours are 9 to 5. The plum blossom display is only up til the 4th, so hurry there if you can!

The other location, open til the 20th, is *Ayabe Mountain* in Tatsuno, a short jaunt west of Himeji. I visited this plum covered mountain last March and was totally delighted with its offerings. Over

20,000 trees cover the park, and your ¥500 ticket gets you a cup of amazake or plum juice along with your entry. *Ayabe Mountain* (or *Ayabeyama*, say that five times fast) is a sprawling pleasure stroll with a view of the seacoast and is a great way to enjoy the fresh air as it begins to thaw out.

Here are the Hyogo website links to both *Kokoen plum display* and the *Ayabe Mountain park*, where you can find more detailed information about how to get there (as I do not recommend my personal "drive around looking for signs until you get there" style of navigation).

Know something else happening in Harima? Let your regional correspondent know! Send an email to publications@hyogo.ajet.net!

Emily Lemmon

Hey, Awaji's Got Monkeys!

If you're wondering what

the small island of Awaji has to offer, I'll be happy to tell you as I continue to explore it. Awaji is an island resort that has everything from an amusement park and giant flower gardens to beautiful beaches, challenging cycling courses, and a monkey center. I can always find something to do on Awaji!

This month, my Awaji ALT friends called me up and asked if I wanted to go check out the *Awajishima Monkey Center*. Of course! If you like monkeys then you're going to love this place. December until May is the best time to see over 200 Japanese macaques. During this time, you can get super close and take tons of pictures of them, but don't touch or pick them up, as cute as they may be. You can feed them though! You go inside a caged room to do it, and they take the food straight from your

hand. It costs ¥200 for the cup of food. It was a very neat experience and I would recommend trying it. After May, the monkeys may not come out to play as much, and your chances of seeing them go down.

After you're done feeding the monkeys, go find the museum. The monkey center has been around since 1967, and this local Awaji family has dedicated their lives to serving this community of wild snow monkeys. The museum houses many pictures of the past monkeys. There is one particularly famous monkey who was born without hands. This is called congenital limb malformation and it happens to about 16% of the macaques on Awaji. Another interesting item found in the museum and gift shop is a book with the owner's daughter, named Saki. She has been accepted as a

part of the monkey community to the point where she dines with them and plays their games. The book has some fascinating pictures of her with them. At age four, she starred in the documentary featured on Animal Planet called, "Little Saki's Monkeys" where it displayed a typical day for her life among the monkeys.

For directions to get to the Monkey Center, take Route 28 (south from Kobe) all the way down past a small fishing village called Yura. You will see a school on your left. At that light turn left and at the fork go right. Follow the signs to the monkey park. You'll reach a "Daffodil Park" called Suisensou first. Feel free to stop there, even though the flowers are finished blooming, to check out "Paradise." It's worth it, especially if you appreciate certain human body parts [editor's note:

phallus!]. (If you want to see an amazing daffodil park, you'll have to go to Minamiawaji's, "Nada Kuroiwa Narcissus Field." From December to February it's suppose to be nothing short of amazing.) Then get back in the car and keep going through the windy roads. If you're about to puke, you're almost there. When you see the ocean on your left, the park will be approaching on your right.

I'd set aside plenty of time to make a visit to the monkey center. It takes a while to drive, plus whatever time you spend taking pictures. Time will fly by! Afterward, you can stop for dinner at "Slow Life" in Yura for the best handmade soba on Awaji. Other restaurant recommendations I have are

"I am..." and "Time after Time" for delectable organic Japanese food in Sumoto-shi (parking available at Aeon).

I recommend getting the set because it comes with your choice for desserts. The banana cake and pumpkin cheesecake are my favorite. Another restaurant is "Cappuccino" on the left side of the road about 10 minutes after leaving Sumoto-shi. Be sure to taste their fresh egg tarts!

This monkey center is open from 9am to 5pm and you can find more information on their [website](#). They have an [English page too](#). Entry is ¥600 for adults and ¥300 for kids.

Veronica Chung

Omuraisu

Ingredients

(serves 4)

- ◎ 2 cups of uncooked rice
- ◎ 8 eggs
- ◎ 300 grams chicken thigh meat (tori no momoniku)
- ◎ 1 onion
- ◎ 1/4 carrot
- ◎ 1 pack of button mushrooms
- ◎ 1 clove garlic
- ◎ 4-5 tablespoons of ketchup
- ◎ 1 tablespoon chicken soup powder (torigara supu)
- ◎ a little salad oil, black pepper, salt
- ◎ lettuce for garnish
- ◎ extra ketchup

Step One

Cook the rice in a rice cooker as normal

Step Two

Mince the garlic, onion & carrot

Step Three

Dice the chicken into small pieces

Step Four

Slice the mushrooms thinly

Step Five

Stir-fry the garlic with a little salad oil; add the chicken to it

Step Six

Once the chicken is cooked, add the vegetables and stir-fry them until tender

Step Seven

Add salt, pepper, and chicken soup powder to the chicken and vegetables, then add the rice and ketchup and stir-fry well

Step Eight

In a bowl mix the eggs with some salt and pepper

Step Nine

In a different frying pan heat a little salad oil and add 1/4 of the egg mix to make an omelette. Once one side is cooked put 1/4 of the rice on top of the omelette and roll it up

Step Ten

Put a plate on top of the fry pan and turn it over to flip the omelette onto the plate

Step Eleven

Serve with ketchup and lettuce on the side

Delicious
tomato flavoured
fried rice
wrapped in an
omelette.

English corner



Finally... a club with a mission statement.



Participate!

Hyogo Times is currently looking for writers to contribute to the following sections:

- ◎ Web Design Manager
- ◎ English Sensei Spirit (column writer)
- ◎ Illustrator
- ◎ Current Events (column writer)

- ◎ Hanshin regional correspondent
- ◎ Tamba regional correspondent
- ◎ Kobe regional correspondent

Contact us today at
publications@hyogo.ajet.net

Satisfying a Sweet Tooth in Sannomiya

à la campagne (アラカンパーニュ)

Ever feel like you need a mini vacation from Japan? Or perhaps have the need to grab some dessert after happy hour at *The Hub*? Well just a few steps away from *The Hub* exists a gateway to another land, a cake shop in the French countryside. With its comfy atmosphere, adorable light wooden décor, French named cakes, and painted walls and awnings to look like the outside of a countryside cottage, and one might as well be wandering through the back roads of Paris.

Walking into *à la campagne* on a Wednesday night with a friend resulted in not only a sweet dessert treat, but an overall sense of warmth and delight in the cozy café, whose width was no wider than my apartment. A small entryway lined with breads and teas for sale led to a neat glass display filled with at least 15 cakes,

tarts, and other desserts of all shapes, colors, and toppings. The selection of desserts ranged from fruit and chocolate tartes and gateaux(cakes) to tiramisu, fromage blancs, and crème caramels. The available desserts appear to rotate in availability. Don't worry if the French names appear to add another level of stress to your restaurant excursions ("It's difficult enough to read a menu in katakana, you're telling me to learn French too?!") honestly, just getting a good look at the display case should be enough for you to know what you would like.

A slice of *tarte aux chocolat et framboise* (chocolate tarte with raspberry fruit brandy) and a slice of *fraise d'amour* (literally, strawberries of love) were each ¥625. A hot cappuccino and a slice of kiwi tart sets you back ¥1,105, so this isn't your discount cake shop. Still, the

price is comparable to the fancy cake stalls in department stores, and the desserts I've had at *à la campagne* have left me feeling deliciously satisfied and excited for the chance to try more.

The *tarte aux chocolat et framboise* was a decadent treat with tastes of dark chocolate, espresso, and fruity raspberry. Atop a crumbly cookie crust, it's the perfect indulgence for if you simply need some chocolate and need some NOW. The *fraise d'amour* was a big surprise for me. Appearing a simple strawberry shortcake, it actually had a creamy whipped layer with chocolate pieces that added crunch and more chocolate indulgence. Strawberries, chocolate, and whipped cream.. a well-rehearsed combination, but it's a classic because it works.

But my favorite of the desserts that I have tried would definitely have to be the kiwi tarte. Topped with a layer of alternating green and yellow-colored kiwi slices (I didn't even know kiwis could be yellow and still be sweet!), the creamy filling, and graham cracker crust was the ultimate treat to me. Usually I am wary of kiwi fruit in anything because some part of the fruit is always too sour or the texture is too tough. But this time, all of the slices were sweet and fit perfectly with the creaminess of the filling. Featured prominently in their menu, I'm guessing it's only a seasonal treat that won't be around for long.

More than simply another cake shop, *à la campagne* provides a charming setting for a first date, getting dessert with a friend,

or winding down alone after a long week at work. The bustle of people coming in and out was just enough to keep the shop feeling lively, but wouldn't disrupt a casual date. And it's open late enough for you to swing by before catching last train. So next time you're in Sannomiya and have a craving for fruit, chocolate, cake, or all three, stop by *à la campagne* and take out a slice for the ride home. In fact, I suggest you grab two, because once you've had a taste of *à la campagne* (especially of their fruit tarts), you won't be able to wait until you get off the train.

Locations:

4 locations in Hyogo. Reviewed location at Moonlight Bill Building (1F-Patisserie, 2F-Café) 1-10-6, Chuo-ku, Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture Kitanagasa-dori. 2 minute walk west of Tits Park, right next to *The Hub*.

Contact Info:

www.alacampagne.jp/index.html (Japanese only), 078-322-0130

Hours:

11:30-23:00

Price:

average ¥1,100 (\$\$)

Cuisine:

French-style patisserie

English friendly?

The patisserie menu is in both English & Japanese. The desserts have French names and displayed prominently in a glass case.

Born to Die

I have a bad habit of setting myself up for disappointment with my unrealistically high expectations.

From the moment that “Blue Jeans” leaked, I had found my new musical obsession. More than anything, I wanted *Born To Die* to blow me away. But alas, it was not to be. Maybe it was all the hype that killed it. Del Rey’s fame seemed to rise in an instant, and the anticipation leading up to her album debut made it seem larger than life. It’s like that box under the Christmas tree you’re sure has the only thing you ever wanted inside, but ends up being a pair of socks. Maybe it’s the horrible void that has been left ever since the sad passing of Ms. Winehouse. I’ve been waiting for another bad girl to break into the scene. I should know that trying to find someone to fill those stilettos is a losing game. And although I was ready to defend Lana to the bitter end after the Twitter defamations and SNL parodies, maybe that was the beginning of the end of my love affair with those luscious lips. At that moment the smallest crack appeared, too small to be visible, but inevitably

doomed to only grow larger with time. Or maybe I’m just being overdramatic. But it hurts when your hopes for someone with such star power like Lana Del Rey are dashed. With that voice, those curves, those lips; she’s definitely got the wow factor. Which is precisely what *Born To Die* is missing; that wow factor. Tracks like “Blue Jeans” and “Video Games” are great, but the rest are pretty forgettable. Production is a detriment rather than an asset: the samples are weird distractions from the vocals that don’t ever sound quite relevant, and the sound effects are corny and ill-placed. Most of what’s happening in the background is annoying interference that only takes away from what should be the main event: Del Rey’s vocals.

It’s been said that the lyrics of *Born To Die* tell the story of Del Rey’s crazy, younger days: small-town mischief, boozing with friends and falling in love with the wrong kind of guy. Definitely the makings of a good story, but together, the tracks lack a cohesiveness, and that prevents that story from being told the way it should, which is a shame.



Still, let’s give credit where credit is due. The beautiful, vintage quality of Lana Del Rey’s voice is really quite captivating. It takes you somewhere - almost back in time - to a jukebox playing in the darkness of a dusty dive in a dead-end town. It’s a piece of Americana she manages to inject some glamor into, although it’s anything but.

The best that *Born to Die* has to offer, “Video Games”, is where Ms. Del Rey shines the brightest. The lyrics are personal and moving, and thankfully the track suffers from much less of the distracting production plaguing the rest of the album.

So while *Born To Die* is a mostly disappointing debut from an artist with so much potential, here’s hoping the recent rumors that *Born To Die* might never have a follow-up prove untrue. After all, everyone deserves a second chance, right?

Laura Liszewski



Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet

by Jamie Ford

I believe the measure of a good book is not how fast you can read it, but whether you are left weeping as you turn its last pages. *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, a story about the struggle between love and loyalty during World War II era America, left me blissfully satisfied by these standards and lingering over some of life’s toughest questions.

Henry Lee is a boy caught between worlds. It is 1942 and World War II is raging overseas, but for the Chinese-American and Japanese-American living in the US, the battle is much closer to home. Japanese families are no longer treated as citizens as fear rises about spies living among them. The rift between Chinese and Japanese families grows as Japan continues to attack in the old country. The threat of internment is looming.

Henry’s father, a deeply loyal and respected Chinese man, finds Henry a place at an all-white school where he can learn to

fit in and “speak his American.” Each day he begrudgingly pins an “I am Chinese” button to his lapel and walks to school. His only friend is Sheldon, a black saxophone player with dreams of playing jazz clubs, whose music fills the street corner Henry passes each day.

Life changes for Henry when he is forced to work in the cafeteria with the new girl, Keiko, a young Japanese girl with a sweet smile. As he at first stumbles and then plunges deeper and deeper in love, he faces the decision to stay true to his young heart or to his father’s wishes to avoid the Japanese.

The story is told from the perspective of Henry Lee as an adult man 40 years after the war has ended. This style of writing is not always smooth, but the author writes the flashbacks in such a way that you aren’t feeling jerked backward and forward. Mr. Ford’s writing flows naturally from past to present as Henry

recalls memories of what he once loved and lost. He introduces us to the people of his past, both charming and relatable. You will find yourself as interested in the side characters as you are in Henry and Keiko.

Reading this book was a pleasure, like relaxing with smooth jazz or enjoying a warm cup of green tea at the Panama Hotel. If you enjoy period books and film, I would highly recommend this book to you. *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* feels like a time capsule to the war years. This book really has something for everyone. It is a story which begs the question “What is an American?” It examines the struggle between pursuing personal desires and honoring our parents. Above all it celebrates love and the idea that it is never too late to fix what is broken.

Rebecca Stock

Niigata Reflections

As I'm sitting in the steamy

outdoor section of the Oosado onsen hotel on Sado Island, Niigata, I'm struck by the vast beauty of the Japan Sea and the snow-covered garden that serves as the only barrier between the hotel and the coast. The scenic view engulfs me in a calm serenity despite the frigid temperature. It's a crisp minus four degrees, and the hot, bubbling onsen water feels like a warm blanket that heats me up to the neck, but not beyond. The wind is blowing in my face and head as I peak just far enough above the water to allow me to breathe; a wispy tickle rather than a forceful shove, but freezing nonetheless.

Where is Niigata and why am I here you ask? Not the typical winter vacation spot for someone from Himeji, it's true. In fact, many of my fellow foreigner friends and neighbors have never even heard of Niigata. I certainly

hadn't before, and I've been in Japan for almost 3 years. After all, there are hundreds of other destinations in Japan that would be just as attractive, exciting, enjoyable, and more accessible, such as Kyoto, Mt. Rokkou, Lake Biwa, Nagano, Beppu, or even Tokyo. So why am I in Niigata? Simple; my wife won the AEON MaxValu lottery. A little over a year ago, AEON ran a contest to promote the use of the WAON card at their MaxValu stores. For every ¥10,000 spent using the WAON card, the shopper got one entry into the lottery. My wife spent enough for 3 entries, and, as the Japanese know so well, the third time is bingo (*sandome no shojiki*). I knew this phrase previously from my two failed attempts to pass the driving test to get my Japanese license (a respectable number considering some of the horror stories I've heard), but this time it had a little different meaning for me.

We received a notification in the mail in late November informing us that we had won an all-expenses-paid overnight vacation package to Niigata. It sounded nice enough, but I wasn't really too excited until I checked out the link for the hotel. The Oosado Hotel is perched on the cliff of Kasuga Cape overlooking the Japan Sea. It's a traditional Japanese ryokan featuring an outdoor onsen with a spectacular view. Our prize package included round-trip airfare for two, tour bus around Niigata for sightseeing, overnight stay at the Oosado Hotel, a tour of the historical Sado Island gold mine, a visit to a magnificent shrine in the Niigata countryside, and two scrumptious crab meals (dinner at the hotel and lunch at the fish market). An added bonus was that we were allowed to take our one-year-old son Thatcher with us for no extra charge. The only part we were responsible for was getting to and from

Itami Airport and any souvenirs or drinks we wanted to buy.

So that's how I got here. Now I'm relaxing in the outdoor onsen with no one else around. It feels nice to be by myself for a brief moment. That doesn't happen too often these days with Thatcher and everything else going on. As I contemplate the exquisite view and the soothing warmth of the friendly nature creeps to the surface and I suddenly recall *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, a short story that I used to teach to my high school students back in Arizona. It's a charming little tale about family values, community cohesiveness, crops...and rocks. The interloping thought sends me on a tangent of comparison; my life as a full-time high school and part-time college teacher in Arizona, and my life now as a teacher in Japan at Himeji High School and Shogai University adult learning center. The contrasts are stark, but there are some similarities too.

America is a country of individuals where people strive to excel and 'be the best you can be' as the slogan goes, whereas Japan is community-oriented, much like the little rural village

that serves as the setting for *The Lottery*. In my Arizona teaching job I had my own room with a desk, computer, and television; my office if you will. In Japan I sit in a large room where my desk is just one of the many teacher desks crammed together like small plants in a potting soil block. America is the land of the free, where you have certain birthrights or entitlements; Japan is the land of the rising sun where people are reverent towards nature and strive to be at one with their surroundings. In America if you don't like something you can protest, sue, or raise support and awareness; in Japan if you don't like something or you are wronged in some way, you try not to say anything, accept the situation, and move on with whatever you were doing before.

My American roots start to intercede in my thoughts and lead to the idea of destiny or fate. Why should I win this amazing vacation? Did I deserve this when so many people are still suffering from the triple disaster in March of last year? Could I be doing something more instead of enjoying this blessing? Am I taking advantage of the situation as a foreigner? I'm suddenly taken back to *The Lottery*; the

concept of belief systems and social constructs come into focus. Many Americans take for granted the quality of life they are born into simply because they don't know anything different. I was just as guilty of this as the next person until I came to Japan and realized that some cultures have value systems that don't focus on the achievement of wealth, fame, and status. Like a flash of lightning I understand. Then my eyes refocus on the Japan Sea, the snow, and the clouds rolling softly across the vast blue sky. I sit upright against the faux rocks and breathe deeply, filling my lungs with fresh sea air. I feel peace and contentment as I settle on the most important realization; the lottery I have won isn't a vacation package to Niigata, it isn't coming to Japan and experiencing a wonderfully unique and vibrant culture, and it isn't being an American and growing up in the richest country in the world for the time period I inhabit. The lottery is life; the most precious gift anyone can receive.

Jason White

Mission: Impossible Ghost Protocol

Nothing is impossible with the help of BMW & Apple.

I'm not sure at what point the CIA just starts giving Tom Cruise the benefit of the doubt. We're going on 3 movies now where agent Ethan Hunt has been framed for trying to destroy the Union, and 3 movies he's not only proven himself innocent, but also saved the world. Anyway, in the future I would just find the guy who blames Tom Cruise and put him in jail from the get-go; saves lots of taxpayer dollars in high-speed car chases and tower climbs. But that also makes for bad theater.

M:I Ghost Protocol is good theater. It's a tight thriller punctuated by some terrific action set-pieces. The movie's prologue features a fast-paced gun fight and a tense breakout sequence from a Russian jail. Agent Hunt dodges guards and complex door lock mechanisms in a tightly choreographed dance that holds the audience at the edge of their seats, and all this before the credits even roll. The credit sequence, by the by, is a neat little expose that hearkens back to the franchise's TV roots.

I won't bore you with plot details, as the movie sure doesn't, but IMF (Impossible Mission Force, not International Monetary Fund) agent Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) is back on the beat, and tasked with taking down

nuclear-minded madman Hendricks (Michael Nyqvist), who has stolen launch codes from the Russians, and plans to plunge the globe into nuclear apocadeath. Hunt is joined by an all-new IMF team comprised of busty ass-kicker Agent Carter (Paula Patton), computer-guy comic relief Benji (Simon Pegg), and mysterious CIA analyst Agent Brant (Jeremy Renner). They have to do everything off the grid, since Hunt was blamed for a bomb attack on the Kremlin, though they seem to face little difficulty engaging private jets and acquiring next gen tech gadgets to aid their operations. Secret agents do have their ways, after all.

The plot is a mess, as I'm sure you can already tell. It would have barely been topical in 1985, since by that point Rocky IV had already won the Cold War. However, the audience forgives the movie its flaw due to the great action, and surprisingly strong characters. Hunt has been sobered by the earlier death of his wife (See MI:3 for more details), and seems to inhabit the role of a leader more comfortably this go-around. He's always been on the run, fighting for his life in a frantic attempt to stay ahead of his pursuers, but in #4 he is on the offensive and in control.

It is refreshing to see what he can really do as an IMF operative. Paula Patton also delivers a strong role as equally emotionally wounded Agent Carter. But she has a strong will and proactive resolution; she's not just another girl around for the ride. Her seduction of the Indian billionaire (Anil Kapoor) in the 3rd act plays out a little differently than would normally be expected. Brant also has a damaged, secret past, though his back-story is a bit...forced. However, the team members all seem a little more multi-dimensional this time around. Except for Benji, because he's just the comic relief, and the movie never lets you forget it.



Sadly, the antagonists don't get the same depth treatment, and end up being one-dimensional and uninteresting. To be honest, I still don't know why Hendricks and his henchmen do what they do. The movie offers up the explanation that he is insane...good enough for me, I guess. One of the baddies, a French assassin woman played by real life French person Lea Seydoux, is really hot, though I'm not sure how much of it is due to the fact she plays a French assassin woman, which is just conceptually mouth-watering. Anyway...umm...very talented young actress...ahem.

But we're here for action! Don't fret, my pets, M:I Ghost Protocol delivers in that department with set pieces that always include interesting twists to what might otherwise have been cliché explosionanzas. Director Brad Bird debuts in the live-action realm spectacularly after having directed big-name animated features like *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*. The Bhurj Khalifa tower climb scene is shot beautifully, with camera angles that highlight the tallness of the building and almost plunge the audience into bouts of vertigo. A thrilling car chase through a desert sandstorm is rife with wrinkles the audience doesn't expect. The movie's climactic battle also showcases the vertical as Agent Hunt and his nemesis engage in fisticuffs while platforms shift, drop, and raise in a tower parking lot. Though the action set pieces themselves are tight and fun, they unfortunately don't always seem necessary to the plot, and I often found myself asking "well, why didn't they just do that instead?"

Which brings us around to another major flaw: the 132 minute running time. That's long even for a Swedish independent movie. It really feels like they took 3 episodes of the TV series, and spliced them into one movie.

On one hand that's good, since it's a cute little homage to the series' beginnings. On the other hand, it feels like too much. When a new BMW rolls up to a Mumbai mansion, ushering in yet another high-tech heist, I could feel the audience collectively groaning and shifting in their seats. A little bit of a tighter narrative would have been appreciated. Oh, speaking of BMWs...product placement in movies needs to take a step back. Tom Cruise et al. seem to inhabit a twin-Earth filled with only BMW and Apple slogans. I know India is a growing economy, but all the cars in their parking garages can't be Bavarian, can they?

However, the pros far outweigh the cons and deliver an action movie to brighten up your Winter. *M:I Ghost Protocol* is a tight, fun thriller worth the price of admission. Go see it.

Sir Sagramore

Guest Movie Review is from Sir Sagramore, of *Impetuous Windmills* where he is part of a podcast and blogging team based in Japan and the US. For more reviews (like the not-available in Japan Chronicle), or to listen to the podcast, visit their website!

**This is not a
dress rehearsal.**

OK! Hands down, *Grey's Anatomy* rocks! I have never missed an episode and have no intention of doing so! In a recent episode, the doctors were separating a pair of Siamese twins and had to rehearse the surgery numerous times until they were satisfied that they were perfect. After watching this and bawling my eyes out (because Teddy's husband died while Christina was operating on him), I went straight to my 'zone' and for my cocktail of choice [cosmo'] and I started to think of my past relationships and how wonderful it would have been if we had had the chance to rehearse.

With a sip of my cosmo', it became apparent to me that the dead and the unborn have it easy! Life is hard: the daily uncertainties, the failures, the promises, the missed opportunities,

the awkward encounters, the misunderstandings, the spills on your favorite sweater, a rip in your 'date' pants and a run in your stockings. How does one survive after each day?

We go to bed every night wishing that tomorrow will be better than today; then we wake up each morning, roll out of bed, put our faces on, and tighten our pony-tails in preparation for the world: a world where we only get to do it once. There are no dress rehearsals, no chance to make a mistake, no time to practice, practice and practice until you are perfect. So it's either swim or sink!

In the performing arts, the actors and directors spend time going over the scenes. Every line must be remembered, every step must be practiced, every cue must be followed, everything must be perfect, or else! Rehearsals are integral

to the performance. However, in life we are not so lucky to have a dress rehearsal and we only get one chance to do it and do it right, or else the consequences can be calamitous.

In a relationship, there are no scripts, no props, no setting, no directors telling you where to stand and what to say, no make-up artist painting your face the way it ought to be, no technical support helping you to find your "light" and good side and definitely, no rehearsals: just you and your partner standing in the midst of a pool of uncertainty, which is your relationship, trying to survive another scene hoping that your performance got a standing ovation as the curtains close!

No one tells us what to say, how to act, where to stand, what to do, when to take a break, when to start over and

there are absolutely no edits. One has to make his/her own scripts and scenes. And in doing so, we are prone to getting the lines twisted, ill-fitted costumes, dreadful make-up, bad lighting, and in many cases the wrong actors to play the right parts. With such a setting, it is impossible to have the perfect symphony. We don't know when to 'end-scene'; there is no chance of changing the script once it has been spoken; no way of shifting to a different scene and coming back to this scene later; and you run the risk of messing up the entire 'production' [relationship].

Imagine for a moment, two persons thrown on the stage life with no help, no support, no guidance, and no direction who are given one chance to create a masterpiece; how realistic is that? I am sure that many of us can attest to the fact that, in our former

relationships, if we had the chance to do it over and over [and no, NOT THAT], we would have definitely gotten it right. If you knew that he would have caught you when you cheated, you wouldn't have done it; if you knew that the argument would have led to an even bigger one and then she would have walked out, you would have never started it; if you knew that searching his phone and finding that text message would have caused your heart to break, you wouldn't have; if you knew that running into your ex at the corner store would have caused you to question your love for your partner, you wouldn't have gone to the store; if, if, if...

In life we all have an unspeakable secret, an irreversible regret, an unreachable dream and an unforgettable love. (Diego Marchi) Wouldn't it

be splendid if we had the opportunity to re-do our days; got a chance to see which bitch will try to mess with you, beforehand; somehow to get a glimpse of your failed relationships before they fail, and fight to keep you and your partner together; a way to peek in the immediate future to avoid all the dramas that you would have undergone, if you had known? Wouldn't all that be fabulous? Well, no such luck!

Dwayne Copourne

Why White Day?

As winter slowly passes and spring edges closer to the hills and valleys of Japan, Valentine's Day has already come and gone. Perhaps some of us had cause to notice, perhaps some of us didn't. While Valentine's Day has never been a holiday of much consequence to me personally, I did find myself very curious about it when I got to this country.

"What is White Day?" I found myself asking. Valentine's Day, much as Christmas, is an imported and inevitably warped celebration here; even earning a brand-new sister holiday one month later on March 14th: White Day, or 愛に答えるホワイトデー (ai no kotaeru white day, or "answering love white day").

Why has Valentine's Day been split in two? Isn't one enough? Curious, I asked Japanese coworkers, students, and friends. From what I've heard, the origins of Valentine's Day in Japan date back to (unsurprisingly) the 1950's. American chocolate companies, hoping to add to their profits by moving the holiday overseas, ultimately got something very different than they intended – and all through a simple error in translation. The Japanese

understood the marketing campaigns as implying that women should give chocolate to men. How this mix-up happened I don't know, but it turned Valentine's Day into a chocolate-making day. For years now, women have been making chocolate to give to their sweethearts, and mothers to their children. Chocolate companies still manage to make their money through Japanese obligatory gift-giving, selling cheap chocolate in mass quantities to be given in the work place.

So what about the women, you may ask? I know I certainly did. I even found myself a little indignant – Valentine's Day is for us girls! We get the chocolates, the flowers, and the fancy dinners! But alas, that sort of date night holiday is already taken up by Christmas here. So, why not make a new tradition out of an old, foreign name?

Insert: White Day. At first I thought White Day (symbolizing white chocolate) was a simple reciprocation day, chocolate for chocolate. Though my proud (and I suppose slightly unfeminist) feelings are still hurt by the women having

to proclaim their love first, on White Day, men have to give back gifts triple the worth of the gifts they received. "Ha!" I said to myself, "triple the chocolate!" But it gets better than that: men now not only give white chocolate, but jewelry, objects of sentimental value, even white lingerie. Much better. However, if a man gives back chocolate of the same value or amount to a woman, it means her love is not returned, and he is only giving it as an obligation. So watch out, ladies! This version of Valentine's Day and the holiday of White Day are celebrated throughout East Asia – in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China.

But there are many of us that these holidays don't concern. Where is the holiday for the singles among us? This question is asked by some every year back home. Well, there is finally an answer for you: South Korea! South Korea has an additional



third holiday on (you guessed it) April 14th, called **Black Day**. Sounds ominous, but it is just a day for singles to get together, eat some noodles, and celebrate their singleness. Seems like a pretty good idea! Maybe we should bring a little bit of that spirit back home with us.

CJ Stearns

Driving.....

A car isn't just an engine,

some doors, and a windshield; that's what a car needs. Not what a car is. What a car really is, is freedom, as a wise pirate once pointed out. In our lives and time, it's the freedom to calculate the cost of gas and tolls against the fares levied by public transportation, the freedom to get lost in the winding nonsensical backroads; it's the freedom to go where and when we choose, not bound by the bus route or train schedule. Such freedom is important to many a member of the JET community.

But this freedom comes at a price, not only in sometimes bearing the role of the sober driver, but also in obtaining the driver's license. This process is a bit of an annoyance for some, and a huge pain in the ass for others. It will depend largely on what country you hail from.

JETs from all countries will have to submit the paperwork to get their license translated, but American JETs will suffer the fate of taking the "practical" driving test, most likely multiple times. The reason for this (I think) is an annoying little glitch with the way our licenses are issued in the States, that is, by state. Within the US, you can use a Kentucky license just as well in California as you can in Florida, but it's written in the Constitution that states may not treat with other countries as individual entities. That means Kentucky can't talk with Japan, only the whole US can. So your Kentucky license can't just be adapted the way an Australian license can.

It is a little ridiculous, though, to drive around a country for a year, and then suddenly be pronounced unfit for driving. Especially if you have driven

yourself to Akashi for the road test and are turned away as a failure, only to drive yourself back home again... But I'm getting ahead of myself.

If you have just signed up for a second year, and have been using an International Driving Permit thus far, you might want to start thinking about getting your Japanese license. If you are American, South African, or Jamaican, you might want to start working on the process now, so you can avoid (or at least minimize) that awkward (terrible) period of time between when your international permit runs out and when you manage to pass the driving test and finally gain your freedom once and for all.

To begin the process, you first need to get your license translated into English, so you can take both this translation

and your license to the Akashi driving center for your written test.

To get your license translated, you have two options. One is to go to JAF and have them do it. The Himeji office location can be found [here](#). Another option is to do this by mail, if you can't get to the office. Fill out the form you will find at the [Hyogo Times website](#) under resources for JETs, and send in all the requisite material, including fees and postage by registered mail. If you go to the office you can pick up a road rules book, which isn't strictly necessary. If you happen to have one of the old JET Diaries lying around, you'll find a section in the back with some helpful images of signs and the like if you are concerned about the written test.

But you need not be overly concerned about the written test. It consists of 10 questions, all fairly straightforward and in not-so-great English, and all true-false or multiple choice. Don't confuse yourself; this is not the GRE. It's not a trick question, it really is that obvious. You must get a 70% to pass the written test in order to take the road test. There is some possibility that you will be allowed to attempt the road test that very day, but more likely you will be asked to make an appointment so you can make a special trip.

You can get a lot of great information at the AJET site (http://www.hyogoajet.net/wiki/Getting_a_License) about these steps, but if you are an American JET, I would suggest starting this process sometime in March for best results. In the April issue, we'll have

more detailed information on Akashi, the test, and how to prepare for it!

Emily Lemmon

(Links provided by Ryan Parker, mail-in form from Ryan Beckman. And in case you want to know the real quote from Jack Sparrow, it's here: *"Wherever we want to go, we go. That's what a ship is, you know. It's not just a keel and a hull and sails; that's what a ship needs. Not what a ship is. What the Black Pearl really is, is freedom."*)

Hyogo Times March Event Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
26 Janken contest for Matsuba Crab festival Shika Station 9:20am – 3:00pm	27	28	29	01	02	03
04 Kasumi Crab Festival Shibayama Port	05 Conference for Returning JETs Chiba	06 Conference for Returning JETs Chiba	07 Conference for Returning JETs Chiba	08	09	10
11	12	13	14 White Day	15 Ako Kotto-ichi (antique market) Oishi Jinja (Shrine)	16	17
18	19	20 Vernal Equinox	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

For more indepth details about all the events, please visit our website: www.hyogoajet.net/hyogotimes