



RAID ON THE

KILLING

COVE

EVERY YEAR IN A HIDDEN LAGOON IN JAPAN, SOME 2,000 DOLPHINS ARE SLAUGHTERED IN BRUTAL FASHION. THIS FALL A GROUP OF CELEBRITIES AND SURFERS DECIDED TO INTERVENE, WITH OUR WRITER IN TOW. HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. *by* PETER HELLER

October 22, 16:20 hours, Denver

At the law enforcement store I put the pile on the counter: black cargo pants, black watch cap, sweater, boots. My wife brings me a fistful of black shooting gloves.

"I'm not going to be doing any shooting," I tell her.

"You never know." Her recreation for years had been Ninja training. This is how she thinks. "Anyway, you won't leave fingerprints."

The clerk had been watching with growing suspicion. "What department you with?" she said.

"None. Hey, do you have tac vests that can hold a notebook?"

"They don't hold notebooks, they hold magazines."

"That'd work."

The clerk's eyes narrow. "Magazines for guns," she says.

"Oh."

She lets me buy the stuff. I am clearly too stupid to do any real civic damage. The guys in Boulder said they'd supply the face paint. I am amped. I am going on a commando mission to Japan.

"You get caught, you do time," a friend tells me just before I leave. "Ninety-eight percent conviction rate. It's all about saving face."

LAST SPRING I PUBLISHED A BOOK ABOUT TIME I SPENT IN ANTARCTICA aboard an eco-pirate ship that chased and tried to disrupt a Japanese whaling fleet. A renowned former *National Geographic* photographer named Louie Psyhoyos picked up a copy, read it, and called me up last fall. He said that there was a hidden cove in Taiji, Japan, where a couple thousand dolphins and small whales are brutally killed every year. He said that the lagoon fills with blood on a daily basis. He was making a movie about it.

He said that in 10 days an international group of celebrities, surfers, and activists, led by the famous Australian surfer David Rastovich, were going to paddle surfboards into the lagoon and intervene, maybe even get arrested, to bring worldwide attention to the practice. Kelly Slater was coming, as was Hayden Panettiere, the invincible cheerleader from the TV show *Heroes*. Louie, who is 50 and lives in Boulder, planned to shoot the whole thing commando style from the air, the water, the cliffs. All the filming had to be done in secret, as the cove was tarped off, razor wired, and heavily guarded. Louie had millions of dollars in backing from his diving and sailing buddy Jim Clark, the Silicon Valley whiz kid who founded Silicon Graphics and Netscape. He also got help from guys who used to work at George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic lab. They had used photos of the cove to fashion floating rocks that matched those of the bay. Inside were high-def cameras to be placed in the middle of the night. Louie also had microphones disguised as leaves and sticks. He had divers and remote feeds. He had FLIR.

"FLIR?"

"Forward-looking infrared," said Louis. "Military-grade thermal cameras. We can detect night patrols."

"Are you fucking with me?"

"You can paddle next to Slater, wear a pencil cam on your head, record the whole thing. Leaving in a week. You in?"

I thought about it, for three seconds. Two deeply held beliefs informed my decision: (A) I like dolphins. (B) When surfers and activists get together for a righteous cause, there's no better party.

October 27, 03:15 hours, Taiji, Japan

The van slows but doesn't stop. From the passenger window, Joe Chisholm, a production manager for Louie, sweeps the small beach with a thermal video camera. One arc light burned a muted halo out of the rain. Steep rock pinnacles bulked against the night.

"Now! Go!" Three of us tumble out the side door, jump a rope, duck below a concrete bungalow, and skirt the strand on a dead run. We have black carpet for going over the razor wire but don't need it. We swing around the fence and over the water, and place the rock cam. Louie, me, and Charles Hambleton, former guitarist for the Samples.

"Pete, you got the Bird's Nest?" Charles says to me.

I hand it up. He is halfway up a tree. The camera looks like its name; it can be operated remotely from a safe vantage 1,500 feet away.

"Hey, Charles?" I whisper.



■ The activists line up on the beach before the first day's paddle-out ceremony. Organizer Dave Rastovich is in the middle, without a shirt.

**AS WE PADDLE OUT, WE SEE THE PILOT WHALES. TEN OR 15.
WE CLEAR THE CORNER AND LOOK INTO THE COVE. IT IS THICK RED,
LIKE PAINT. AN ENTIRE INLET OF BLOOD.**

“Unh.” He has a wire tie in his mouth, and a bunch of ferns.

“Did you write that song, ‘Feel Us Shaking?’”

“Unh—”

“One of my all-time favorites.”

“Unh-huh—”

It’s strange. The wind is stiff off the sea and smells of salt, and even this deep into the inlet I can hear waves splashing. I am excited and having fun, but off to the right is a black hole where the killing cove lies. It feels like a darkness deeper than just the absence of daylight, like the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Two days after Louie called me, I had driven up to his studio in Boulder. Louie named his film company the Oceanic Preservation Society, which has a perfect acronym: OPS. He and Charles had shown me footage. The dolphins were driven into the lagoon in whole pods, groups of families. They were slashed with spears and knives. They were spiked behind the blow hole and bled out in the shallows. They shivered and cried and took a long time to die as their babies swam wildly around them. Soon I’ll be witnessing this.

Charles jumps down. We have to hurry, get up to the blind on the cliffs. In a couple hours dawn will flush the North Pacific. Then the celebrities and activists will roll in.

“Hey Charles,” I whisper, as I help him quickly unwind the receiver wires to the nest cam, “I feel like I’m in the weirdest dream.”

“Don’t worry, it’ll get weirder.” He secures an antenna with camo tape. “Wait’ll you see—the helicopter.”

THE REASON WE ARE HERE IS Flipper. There were five dolphins that played him in the hugely popular TV show from the 1960s, and they were all trained by the same man, a guy named Ric O’Barry. O’Barry had been with the navy’s elite anti-submarine hunter-killer group. He had blown off his right thumb with an underwater shotgun while doing stunt work with sharks for the Bond movie *Never Say Never Again*. Working closely with dolphins, he had seen firsthand the uncanny intelligence, emotions, and communication skills.

“I knew they were self-aware 30 years before any of the studies confirmed it,” O’Barry had told me by phone before we left for Japan. “Every Friday night I’d pull a long extension cord and a TV out to the end of the dock and Flipper would watch *Flipper*. She loved it.”

O’Barry is now the marine mammal specialist for the conservation group Earth Island Institute. He’s 68, graying, tough, tattooed, and hell-bent on stopping the slaughter of dolphins in coves like Taiji. “The 13 boats leave the harbor at first light,” he said. “They find a pod of dolphins or pilot whales and bang on long metal poles in the water. This creates an acoustical net. They drive them into the cove and net it off, then they kill them in the most brutal way imaginable. The healthiest females are selected for captivity, for dolphin shows, aquariums. They’re pulled out, away from their dying families.”

The Japanese permit the killing of 23,000 dolphins and small cetaceans every year, according to the environmental group. Most are harpooned offshore, but the particularly horrific method used in Taiji—called a “drive hunt”—is also used in two other coves in Japan. One top dolphin scientist, who wishes to remain anonymous, told me that

a Japanese aquarium official had said to her, “The government thinks of them as pests who eat all the fish. They tell us to kill them.”

Sakae Hemmi, an environmentalist in Japan who has been documenting the slaughter for years, says local fishermen can get close to \$10,000 for a live bottlenose dolphin and twice that for larger species. Those that are sold for food fetch only a fraction of that. “The meat goes to stores and school lunch programs, and it’s dangerously high in mercury,” O’Barry says. “If it weren’t for the money involved in selling live dolphins, this industry would have rightfully died years ago.”

For the last five years O’Barry has been standing beside the cove watching the killing. Sometimes he has to enter town in a wig and gauze mask so he won’t be hassled by angry fishermen and the Japanese mafia. He had been trying to get the world’s attention, but no one seemed to be listening. A break came two years ago when Louie Psyhoyos learned of the cove. He had wanted to make a movie about the sea, something that would bring attention to its deterioration, and when he saw images from Taiji he knew he had a subject.

04:25 hours

Charles lowers himself hand to hand, tree to tree, off a rain-slick cliff. The blind is a little ledge hemmed in by brush. For a rock star he’s pretty agile. Turns out he’s a world-class sailor who worked on all three *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, teaching the pirates how to be pirates—how to handle sails, move around a ship. He even played a pirate in all three films.

Louie and I climb down. Quickly he and Charles unshuck tripods and set them up against trees. They screw on high-def XD and infrared cams. The thermal camera will catch the thrashing and fountains of blood, even through the tarps. Then they cover the cameras with leafy camo and tie ferns and leaves to the tripod. We wait. A navigational light blinks on some ravaged point. The black SWAT boots that the lady at the law enforcement store assured me were waterproof slowly fill with rain.

When first light blues the water and seeps into the cove, we hunch

into camo coats and dab on face paint. And I catch my breath. The Japanese pen-and-ink coastal landscapes I have always loved take on shape and life all around us. The cove below is hollowed out of rock spires spilled with gnarled trees. A pair of large golden hawks drifts in lazy circles over us.

The lagoon has two fingers. On our right is the one with a public beach you can drive to, and straight down is the hidden deep-cut killing cove. We are looking right into it. On the beach of this inlet sit big rolls of pale green: the tarps the hunters use to hide the kills. This morning they won’t need them, because there are no dolphins in the lagoon. I am relieved: not as dramatic a media event for the surfers’ action, but we won’t have to witness any killing.

Hours pass. The celebrities got a late start from Osaka, we learn. It’s a five-hour drive. We stuff hand warmers into our soaked shirts, doze. Finally we get the call. “Okay, time for you to go,” Charles says. “I’ll take you.” We climb off the ledge, and he leads me down the mountain. “Good luck.”

“Thanks.” I strip out of my clothes, dig in my pack, and snug on a thick wetsuit.

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■ Top: A tearful trio: Aussie idol Isabel Lucas, pro surfer Karina Petroni, and *Heroes* hero Hayden Panettiere. Bottom: The author (foreground), with guitarist Charles Hambleton, go Special Ops during their mission to place hidden cams.

“I think Shaun got a lot of Dad’s competitive nature, his drive, and his strength,” Jesse says. “It makes me laugh to think about how similar they are. They even walk alike. Seriously, it’s really weird. But they are different in their ability to assess situations. The Rog is great, but he has definitely made some wrong decisions when on a snowboard. Just ask him about breaking his nose at Mammoth. Shaun has this knack of seeing things beforehand, assessing them, and making the right choice.”

The Rog, who cops only to a separated shoulder at Mammoth when I phone him later, thinks Shaun’s levelheadedness stems from growing up in a tight-knit family. “We were together so much that the kids never really were able to get off on the wrong foot, like hanging out where they shouldn’t. If it wasn’t a competition we were going to, it was an event, like an MTV thing where he wanted to go and skate the ramp.” Still, the elder White is amazed at how his son can juggle so much now. “It’s like *Donkey Kong*, where the barrels come from one side or the other, and you climb the ladder. I was thinking, How long can this go on? And it’s done nothing but accelerate.”

Since more barrels could come in the form of acting gigs, I ask Shaun about his prospects there.

“I could see myself doing some of that stuff,” he says. His work thus far includes an HP commercial and a Scorsese-helmed AmEx spot, where behind the scenes, White says, fellow thespian Andre Agassi took one look at his red mane, shook his head sadly, and lamented, “You’re gonna have that until you’re 80.”

“Mark doesn’t even send me half of the scripts,” White continues. “I’ve gotten tons that I just don’t think are that rad.”

Because they want you to be Spicoli 2.0? “Kinda,” he says. “I just figure you gotta bust into it in a good way instead of just doing it ‘cause it’s there.”

Young fans line up on the catwalk facing our seats and call Shaun’s name. Older guys from the box next to us stream over for pictures and autographs. The mom of the look-alike asks White to record the outgoing message on her son’s phone, and he complies. He graciously ducks into the box again to fulfill some phone interview duties. Ervin looks at me and says, “We could be anywhere, Moscow, and this is the reaction he gets. I don’t know how he does it. But he likes it.”

When I look into the box all I see are a mess of red hair and a gigantic smile, as White jabbars away on the phone. It dawns on me that all of this is Shaun Time as well. What good is being a star if you can’t relish it?

After the game, on the way out, I ask White how he would rate his life, and without pausing too long, he gives it “an 8 or 9.” I knew he wouldn’t say 10. That probably won’t come until he wins an Oscar. Or until he hears about some kid in some jam room somewhere in America trying to learn to play a Shaun White guitar riff.

As we pile into the SUV, heading back to the hills, White considers the rating again, and adds, “I’m just trying to have the most fun I can right now.” m

The protest was the idea of a surfer from Australia who looks like Jesus. Rastovich, 27, is perhaps the most popular board rider in the Southern Hemisphere. He is a “free surfer,” meaning he does not compete, but he’s so magnificent on waves that he gets paid just to be himself. He is married to a gorgeous blonde who goes by the name Hannah Mermaid. Whenever she can she slips on a shimmering blue tail and leaps into the water for the cameras. When she wriggles onto shore, Rastovich carries her in his arms to the car, her tail dangling. It makes a killer picture. A man like this, you’d think, would be content. He isn’t.

What drives Rastovich nuts is that the ocean he loves is dying. He can no longer surf his favorite barreling breaks after a rain because of the toxic effluence of nearby rivers. And most horrifying to him, the surfers he considers the originals — the dolphins — are scarcer, dying off as bycatch in fish nets, from the collapse of fish stocks that feed them, and hunting. He decided he wanted to bring his global network of friends together over the issue and started the website surfersforcetaceans.com.

Last June, Rastovich sailed on the eco-pirate ship Farley Mowat in the Galápagos with the radical environmental group Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. It’s the same ship I accompanied for my book. The group’s founder, firebrand Paul Watson, scorns banner-waving protests and instead preaches physical intervention. Like destroying nets, ramming whaling ships. He claims to have sunk eight. After some long conversations with Watson, Rastovich decided he needed to take direct action in Taiji. Within four months he had pulled together more than 40 celebrities, musicians, filmmakers, and activists for what he called a peaceful paddle-out ceremony for the dolphins. This is the traditional send-off surfers enact for a fallen comrade. They circle out in the water on their boards and send up prayers for his final ride. “Like every culture, we have our rituals,” says Rastovich.

12:45 hours

The village of Taiji has a disturbing double life. The first thing you see driving in is a large statue of a humpback whale with a baby, and a banner: WE LOVE DOLPHINS! Sidewalk tiles are inscribed with every species of whale, and there’s a whale museum with a whale fluke fountain and a statue of a boy riding a leaping dolphin. Wyland, the famous whale artist, painted a huge right whale on one outer wall. Behind the museum is a marine park, where dolphins perform choreographed shows. The Japanese tourists laugh and clap and eat dolphin sandwiches.

Not 400 yards away, almost every morning between September and April the most bloody and prolific slaughter of cetaceans anywhere on the planet is taking place. One of OPS’s rock cam video clips shows a man spiking screaming dolphins and the back of his jacket reads: “Taiji Whale Museum Staff.”

There is no contradiction for the locals. Part of the problem, says O’Barry, is that the Japanese kanji character for whale means “monster fish.” “When they drag a live dolphin over the ground by a hook in its eye,” he says, “they are, to them, dragging around a fish.”

The locals must have known something was up when the caravan of vans and the semi truck rolled through town. But no police, no fishermen blocked the convoy. Maybe it was the meeting Rastovich had had with a couple of local elders the night before, assuring them that the protest would be peaceful. He’d told them about the lab-confirmed mercury levels in the dolphin meat they eat. The elders seemed shocked. They thought it was the stomachs and organs alone that were dangerous. They seemed grateful for the information.

When the cars pull into the parking lot by the cove, I am standing in a wetsuit and my jaw drops. The big side door of the semi slides open and inside is a 24-foot blimp painted like a whale: one of the OPS camera platforms. I laugh. How the hell did they get that thing into the country?

Three dozen surfers in wetsuits spill out of the vans, grab boards, and hit the beach. Slater had opted out at the last minute, preferring to get into a fight with paparazzi in Israel and train for another surfing title. But *Heroes* star Panettiere is here, as is Isabel Lucas, a willowy 22-year-old Australian TV idol. I see Karina Petroni, a top U.S. surfer and at 5-foot-11 easy to spot, and James Pribram, the American pro surfer who travels the world shredding waves and writing about environmental problems he encounters along the way.

We stand in a line in front of our boards. The rain has stopped but the wind shakes them. Rastovich quickly hands out flowers and explains that we come in peace, with respect for the locals and the Japanese, to honor the lives of the dolphins that have died here.

We hit the water, paddle out into the middle of the cove, form a circle, toss the flowers, hold hands. A remote-control helicopter with a panning camera appears over the rock spur and hovers. I grin. My boys, I think.

23:00 hours, Osaka

The mood back at the Hearton Hotel is celebratory. No dolphins had died, no one had gotten arrested or assaulted, and surely the whalers in Taiji would take notice of the international attention, the respectful goodwill. The sake flows. Whenever we run low, we buy more from the vending machine in the hall.

A large group of us wades up an alley packed with revelers, noodle shops, and girlie bars. We find a karaoke joint. In a crowded private singing room the beer laps over the table. So does Hayden, who steps between the glasses and brings down the house with her version of “Billy Jean.” For one of the biggest stars on one of the biggest shows on TV, she’s one down-to-earth 18-year-old. It’s also clear she loves the limelight. She and Hannah Mermaid outdo each other with hip-grinding dances. And Karina, the surfer, is so irrepresible she drags in the Japanese kids who staff the place, makes them sing, and whips them into such a frenzy they have to be evicted.

Saving the world is hard work.

October 28, 17:00 hours, Osaka

Rastovich calls a small and urgent meeting in one of the hotel’s tiny rooms. O’Barry phoned him from Taiji earlier in the day to report that 30 pilot whales had been driven into the cove

for slaughter the next morning. It feels like a cynical rebuke, a big, flying Japanese fuck-off, and Rastovich is furious. He wants to go back. Right at dawn, during the killing. He wants to take six of the highest-profile people. He wants to cross the nets, right under the spears of the whalers. He wants to paddle into bloody water, blow the lid off the whole thing.

The last two people who tried this were Sea Shepherd activists, in 2002. One cut a net before they were both grabbed violently out of the water, one by the throat. They were thrown in jail for 28 days, heavily fined, and deported.

Aussie actress Lucas signs on to Rastovich’s plan without hesitation. Hayden wants to go, but her mother/manager isn’t so sure. Any mother would balk. The two talk heatedly in the hall. Then Hayden comes back into the room beaming. She flashes a thumb’s-up. Rastovich and his wife Hannah Mermaid would go. Karina, too. They ask me to go, as the journalist. I could wear a small video cam on my head and record the whole deal. I agree.

October 29, 01:00 hours

We load our surfboards and head out for Taiji. The OPS team left hours earlier with its cameras. Whatever happens, they will record it. We drive through empty streets, up deserted dark highways. It’s a long drive, so we chat to pass the time. Hayden tells me she grew up in suburban Palisades, New York. Her father is a retired New York City firefighter who lost many friends in 9/11. She’s always loved animals, and when she met Jeff Pantukhoff of the conservationist group Whaleman Foundation at a Hollywood event and heard about the plight of the whales, she decided to accompany him to Mexico, to Baja California’s San Ignacio Lagoon. From the moment she saw gray whales in their own habitat, she was a committed conservationist.

A half-hour outside of the village, just at first light, we all crowd into the one van with the surfboards. We will have to be fast to get out into the cove while the killing is taking place, without being blocked or arrested.

At dawn we park in a circle behind the big humpback and calf statue, hunker down below window level, and wait. Everybody is a little scared. The fishermen have spears and long knives. They are known to get violent in the presence of undesired visitors.

Charles the guitarist is on a mountain, in camo, filming down into the inlet. At just after 7 AM he radios Louie on another mountain, who in turn calls Joe, our driver.

“They’re killing,” Louie yells. “Go! Go!”

Joe pulls out. To hide that he’s an American, he’s wearing a gauze surgeon’s mask and sunglasses. He speeds the 300 yards through a tunnel and pulls to an abrupt stop. “Now!”

We slip out, run to the rear, grab boards, and dash down the steps to the public beach. No police. Ten running steps across the gravel and we splash onto our boards. Then a sprint paddle out to the rock spur that guards the corner of the killing cove. As we paddle out we can see the open ocean beyond the mouth of the lagoon, a pale tint of rose over the water. We can see a net right in front of us. We paddle over it. Then we see the pilot whales. Ten or 15, silvery gray, pressed in panic against a far net. There had been close to 30 yesterday.

They huddle tighter as we get closer. We clear the corner and look into the cove. It is thick red, like paint. An entire inlet of blood.

We form a tight circle. We sit on the boards and make a kind of prayer. The large dolphins beyond us look our way and visibly calm. They flow together. A baby sticks its head up. Then a boat cruises around an outer point of rock, a long, open motorboat. The fisherman throttles when he sees us. Eighty yards beyond the pilot whales are two more nets, and he skims over them. Even if we could have cut this near net, there were these others, and the kill boats beyond them. The whaler wheels dangerously close, standing, yelling. He motions for us to go. I look around our little circle. Everyone seems calm, poised. The whaler revs his motor and tries to frighten us with the propeller. He comes so close to Hayden’s leg where she sits on her board that she has to move. Furious, he circles once more and heads to the beach.

Rastovich tells us to paddle out, not in. Closer to the dolphins. We do. It’s a bold move, as the cops must be scrambling. We are yards away from the pilot whales now. The little pod huddles against the net, and we can hear them breathe, hollow blows over the slick water. We float in the blood of the other half of their pod. Hayden begins to cry quietly. Then Isabel. Then Hannah. Then, to my surprise, so do I. This is what editors call going native, getting too close to a story. I don’t give a fuck.

Soon the boat speeds out to us again, and this time there are four whalers aboard. They feint with the prop. We hold the circle. One yells wildly, picks up a long forked pole, and jabs it at the closest boards. He hits Hannah in the thigh, then shoves Hayden’s board. Both women stay calm, keeping their balance. Behind them I notice the pilot whales going crazy, thrashing against the net. Okay, enough, Rastovich says. “Let’s paddle in. Stay against the rocks.” We break the circle and push hard for the beach. Hayden is in front of me. I see her wade out of the water and collapse to her knees, sobbing without restraint. A local whaler rushes up to her, roaring like an enraged bear. Hayden’s Hollywood mom, waiting for us on the beach, perfectly coiffed and made-up, steps in front of the big man, and with a face fired with mockery and scorn says, “*Whoooo!* Whoooo!” The man pulls up, shocked, and backs away. Go girlfriend.

We throw the boards in the back of the van, duck to the floor, and speed away. Forty-five seconds later sirens wail and police cars speed past us, going the other way.

Two hours later, at the edge of Wakayama Prefecture, we are pulled over by 13 police cars and more than 30 cops. They are very polite. They write down our flight information and take photos of our passports. They want to know who crossed the nets. They take down the names. “Conspiracy to interfere with commerce” is a jailable offense. The police back in Taiji want to make arrests. “Some sensitivity about dolphins,” they say cryptically. But these cops wave us on. Momentary reprieve as the authorities figure out what to do with these six gaijin interlopers.

Back in Osaka we all change our flights and leave the country before the higher-ups decide to make someone pay.

Home now, I’m amazed at the press the protest has been getting. *People*, CNN, AP, MSNBC, *Ellen*. Hayden is everywhere, a real-life hero. Ric O’Barry, who stood by the cove alone for so many years, is thrilled. And as for me, when I try to sleep the image of those 10 pilot whales returns. They are raising their heads, watching us. They’re wondering why we’re there, but they don’t feel threatened by us. A boat approaches. I lie quietly beside my sleeping wife and am shaken by a grief I can’t explain.

There’s a new development on November 15. We hear reports on the evening news that the Japanese have issued a warrant for the arrest of Hayden and the five surfers who crossed the net. The Taiji Six, my editor calls us. “I guess they could come here and get us, but probably not,” Hayden tells a reporter. “I was very excited that people were interested in what we did. In this town, you tend to only get publicity for not wearing underwear or going to rehab.”

I call the Japanese embassy in Washington to see if it’s true. I’d love to go back to Japan someday, and I don’t want to spend my vacation in jail. I get routed to the economics desk.

“I am one of the six who paddled into the Taiji cove. I hear there is a warrant for me?”

“Yes. Ahh!” says the economics official. “You the one on NPR!”

“Yes,” I say, grimacing. Two days earlier I had been on the Diane Rehm show, blasting the Japanese whaling practices.

A cool silence.

“Look, is there a warrant for me?” I finally say. “Can you confirm it?”

“I am sorry. That is an internal matter.”

“Look, I have no beef with the Japanese people. I love the Japanese people.”

“Ohh, thank you.” He sounds genuinely pleased. “I love American people!”

I call Hayden next. “Is it true?”

“I think it’s true. But I think it’s a scare tactic, so we don’t come back.”

“You wanna go back?”

“Absolutely.”

“Wow.”

“See you soon,” she says as we hang up. “In Japan.” m

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