

JET: Or, How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Kancho

Version 0.9

04-24-07

Most everything there, need to touch up parts of the script, check scansion, add Japanese dialogue, and add Culture's reading assignment.

Main characters, all gender neutral, names to be based on the actors:

Our Hero - Or, at least, protagonist. They're slacking their way through Japanese, hang out with the anime club crowd, are wrapping up a History major for lack of anything better to do, and have the vague notion that teaching in Japan will be awesome. Cartoons, video games, cute dating partners - it's the motherland, right? Yeah, you just keep telling yourself that.

Straight Man - Or woman. The important thing is that they're in the musical to be rational, something that eludes the others, who will spend the musical bouncing off our paragon of sanity. They did well majoring in Japanese and want to do JET in order to brush up their language skills and perhaps get a job there afterwards. They also have the sense to realize that Japan isn't quite the font of all fanboy joys. The Straight Man is good pals with Our Hero and tends to be playful when chatting with them while more sarcastic when talking to other folks.

The Otaku - Speaking of fanboy joys, the Otaku barely managed to get an Art major and is completely and utterly obsessed with degenerate fanboy culture Akihabara style. Moe, maid cafes, and doujinshi await, and maybe teaching if they can be bothered to go to class occasionally. They're using JET as an excuse to get over to Japan and, if possible, elude authorities and never leave.

Culture-san - They're an obsessed Asian Studies major who is in love with the powerful beauty of traditional Japanese culture. Every aspect of traditional Japanese culture, no matter how esoteric or dangerous to others. They're also hopelessly straight-laced and utterly uptight. Don't worry, it won't last. They're in JET in order to immerse themselves fully in Japan's centuries of tradition, not realizing that it's all been infected by pop culture and Hello Kitty. Possibly a good role for a woman rather than entirely gender neutral.

Nihongo - Finally, there's the person who completely aced a Japanese major by virtue of speaking Japanese all the time and, if possible, nothing else. They're a complete enigma to the rest of the cast and are pursuing JET for reasons only they know.

Other characters:

JET Staff 1

JET Staff 2

Flight Attendant

Teaching Assistant

Principal

Staging notes:

Utterly minimal, as per last year's musical, with only chairs, possibly a

table, and perhaps a lecture podium as the sets. Any time the characters are teaching a class they walk to the front of the stage and use the entire audience as their classroom, with COUP members planted in the audience to provide dialogue, a wireless mic being shuttled to them as needed.

Costume notes:

Minimal and, in a pinch, unnecessary. Ideally:

Our Hero: Jeans and a plain t-shirt.

Our Heroine: The same, perhaps a bit classier. Button down shirt and slacks, maybe?

The Otaku: Anime t-shirt - perhaps I can dig my Lum shirt out of the closet - tucked into jeans, with suspenders. Hair should be disheveled and, if male, they should avoid shaving for a few days before the con.

Culture-san: Well dressed, perhaps even in a kimono for a few scenes (or all of 'em) if we can dig one up.

Nihongo: A business suit.

Other notes:

Nihongo and a few other characters speak in Japanese. I know diddly squat about Japanese and will need to have this dialogue provided for me. We can do this by either a) having the character speak straight-forward Japanese dialogue, b) having the character speak random phrases from a Japanese study guide (i.e. "Can you tell me how to find the train station?"), or c) having the character speak Japanese word salad (i.e., "Sukiyaki densha bento wa?") Random phrases would probably be easiest and would tie in with a joke near the end of the musical.

When Japanese characters aren't speaking Japanese, they're speaking in clear, somewhat slow English. There's no accent, but their diction is careful and they take their time.

There are also two sequences to be filmed and edited in advance: two faux-newsreels (in black and white with strident, martial music) about the JET program and kancho respectively. Laura can provide her camera, Bloodworth can edit, so hopefully we can get these filmed and wrapped up before the absolute last minute. Maybe. I'm going to work out full shot-by-shot scripts for these seperately later; for right now just the narrator voice-over is included.

(Opening: House lights stay down as the JET newsreel-parody opening begins with a triumphant, strident fanfare.)

Japan! Also known as Nippon or the Land of the Rising Sun, this mysterious, remote oriental country is now one step closer to us thanks to the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program! Established by General MacArthur in 1947, the JET program sends bright-eyed graduates of our nation's universities to these distant islands in order to teach the native

populace English - and perhaps learn a thing or two in return! Yes, these cultural ambassadors will provide endless opportunities for learning and education in schools scattered from one end of Japan to the other. All American salutes these fine individuals, doing their part to spread literacy and democracy across the world!

(Lights rise as "America" from West Side Story begins, cast strolling onto stage, twirling around each other, laughing among themselves, and taking up casual positions as Hero begins to sing:

Our Hero (Awestruck and giddy):

Distant Nippon
Exotic Islands
Islands of wild universes
Always the bright arcades going
Always the awesome cartoons showing

Straight man (Cynical):

Modern Japan
You mundane islands
Islands of business and commerce
Always bad comedy showing
Always the salarymen going
And the money flowing
And tempura frying
And bullet trains flying
I like the island of Honshu
(To Our Hero)
If only that meant something to you!

(Culture and Otaku)

I want to work in Japania
No time to shirk in Japania
Schoolkids to teach in Japania
It's tough to reach old Japania

Our Hero: I like the city Tokyo!
Straight Man: It's their only city you know
OH: Hundreds of comics to be gained!
SM: Hundreds of people on each train

All

Travel by rail in Japania
English for sale in Japania
Dominant male in Japania
Crowded as hell in Japania

OH: I'll play teh latest RPGs
SM: I'll make good use of my degrees
OH: How hard could it be to get there?
SM: Boy are you in for a scare

All

American goes to Japania
Big "Ohayo!"s in Japania
If you should roam in Japania
You're far from home in Japania

OH: I'll bet it's just like Blade Runner!
SM: It's more like New York in the summer
OH: All the sushi there is so good
SM: Dude, you're allergic to seafood!

All

Opportunity in Japania
Hope they pick me for Japania
Across the sea to Japania
I'm going to flee to Japania!

OH: When I arrive in Tokyo...
SM: Who's crazy enough to let you go?
OH: I'll be the first to buy you a beer
SM: Assuming you aren't still stuck back here

Song fades, all exit stage except for Hero and Straight Man in the center:

Our Hero: Right, that's it. I'm going to do it!

Straight Man: Over the past four years, I have yet to see any good come from you declaring that you're going to do something. That said, I'm morbidly curious. What, exactly, are you going to do?

Hero: I'm going to apply for the JET Program!

Straight: You're going to head off to Japan and teach English.

Hero: Yep!

Straight: You who have never been more than three hours away from home for more than a night at a time...

Hero: Except for that one road trip to Anime Weekend Atlanta!

Straight: ...except for that one road trip to Anime Weekend Atlanta, which you only went on because you got in the car thinking we were all headed to the movies.

Hero: And it worked out great!

Straight: Sure, great, except for the fact that you blew all your cash in the dealer's room the moment you walked in and had to panhandle to get enough money together to buy a spare pair of underwear for the weekend.

Hero: And the fact I was able to be so resourceful in such a crisis speaks of my abilities as a world traveller! Besides, I can't think of any place I'd rather live than Japan.

Straight: Really?

Hero: Yep!

Straight: Again, I am plagued with curiosity. Surely I am a cat who is determined to set the new speed record for the Nine Life Dash. Look, (Hero's name), tell me: What, in your opinion, is Japan like?

Hero: Um...I'm not entirely sure, but I have a pretty good idea.

Straight: Oh, really?

Hero: Well, kinda. But, I do know that it's where the cartoons and comic books come from, and that's pretty freakin' cool. Ooh, and they've got huge arcades there, can't forget that! And a bunch of salarymen I guess.

Straight: Is that it?

Hero: Well, I guess folks live off sushi, ramen, and Pocky - mostly sushi, though - and I know all about their school system, so I reckon I'm pretty prepared.

Straight: I'm pretty sure there's a bit more to Japan than "That cool place where anime, fish, and junk food come from". Also, I'm not entirely certain that watching a lot of Bleach provides an accurate portrayal of Japanese high school life.

Hero: Okay, so it's probably a bit different than I'm expecting, but it'll still be okay. I think I'd be good at teaching the kids...

Straight: As I recall, the last time you tried to mentor at the local high school they beat the hell out of you behind the gym.

Hero: I've got some Japanese under my belt...

Straight: One big semester, which I believe you scraped through with a D.

Hero: ...and, besides, it's not like I've got anything else going on after I graduate.

Straight: Congrats. You finally said something I can agree with.

Hero: Alright, O High and Mighty One, what are you up to after graduation?

Straight: Er...to be honest, I'm thinking about applying to the JET program.

Hero: Ha! It isn't just me!

Straight: What else do you expect me to do with a Japanese major? JET is perfect. I can immerse myself in the language, the culture...

Hero: ...the local bar scene...

Straight: Yes, it's a logical extension of everything I've studied over

the past four years. Now, as for you...

Hero: It's a logical extension of everything I've studied over the past four years?

(Straight stares at Hero for a beat.)

Hero: Okay, perhaps not, but it still sounds like a good time. Besides, what the heck.

(Straight sighs)

Straight: I suppose it's difficult to argue with "what the heck" as an answer, and if we're going to do this thing we should do it right. Applications are due in next week and as of right now you and I are part of the JET Program Death Pact.

(The two clench hands in a single, raised fist)

Together: Death pact!

Hero: And, besides, it beats getting a real job.

Straight: I look forward to reminding you of that particular bit of desperate rationalization.

(Straight puts their arm around Hero and leads them towards the side of the stage, pointing off into the glorious future.)

Straight: Now, hie thee to their website! We have applications to prepare!

(Dim lights to indicate a scene change, raising them with our heroes standing in the same place (sans arm and pointing) with The Otaku and Culture-san in line behind them.)

Straight: I can't believe you made it to the interview process.

Hero: What can I say? I'm good at selling myself on paper.

Straight: Even after I kept you from slipping in those twenties into the envelope. I'm impressed! Now, how are you at selling yourself in person?

Hero: Um.

Straight: You've got to get it together. Look at all the competition from our school alone!

(They turn to look at the other two in line beside them.)

The Otaku (to Culture-san): The question isn't "What part of Japan will I be stationed in?", it's "What district of Tokyo will I be stationed in?" And the answer, of course, is Akiba!

Culture-san (confused): Akihabara is a shopping district. I'm not entirely sure they have schools there.

Otaku: Minor detail, minor detail.

Straight (to Otaku): Good lord, they let you get this far in the interview process?

Otaku: What can I say? As a man of character, distinction, and unwavering dedication to Japanese pop culture, I was destined to overcome any hurdles in my path!

Culture: More importantly, he slipped a few twenties into his application packet.

Hero: Oh, hey, (Culture's name), fancy meeting you here.

Straight: By which you mean "this was inevitable, wasn't it"? (To Culture) How's it going?

Culture: Well, thank you. We had an excellent turn-out for the end-of-semester Thousand Crane Fold-Off and no one called the police when we snuck in a bit of live steel for the weekly kendo demonstration.

Otaku: Huh. And here I thought Bob was just desperate for a lame excuse to skip the anime club when he said he had to go have his fingers reattached.

Hero: Well, I can't say I'm suprised to see you guys here with us for the interview. I guess this is everyone from our school who's hardcore enough to apply for JET.

(Nihongo runs onto stage, spins around once on one foot, and strikes a pose, arms stretched wide in benevolent welcome.)

Nihongo: Ohayou, mina!

Hero: Gesundheit.

Straight: Well, you might have been forgetting one other person.

Culture-san: Good morning, (Nihongo's name)! And how are you doing today?

Nihongo: (Rattles off a moderately long sentence.)

Culture-san: My, you don't say.

(A JET official walks on stage.)

JET 1: Hello everyone! Welcome to the next stage of the JET application process. We'll be calling each of you in one at a time for a short interview. Don't worry, it's all very casual, so just relax and you'll be fine. Now, let's start with (consults a sheet), oh, (Hero's full name).

Hero: Okay, here goes nothing.

Straight: Be cool, my friend, and it'll all be just fine.

Hero: Yeah. Cool. After all, what's the worst that can happen?

(The other cast members clear off stage except for Hero and JET 1, while JET 2 walks on stage holding a chair.)

Hero: Well, first off I'd like to say what an honor it is to be here today and-

(Hero is cut off as they're shoved into a chair by JET 2.)

JET 2: Sidddown, kid.

(If possible, lighting should be reduced to a single spotlight on our hero.)

JET 1: Now, look here, kid. We can make this easy for you if you just cooperate, see?

Hero: Cooperate?

JET 2: You heard the man, now talk! What do you know?

Hero: Know? Know about what?

JET 2 (grabbing Hero by the collar): DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH ME, PUNK! NOW SPILL IT!

JET 1: Easy, easy, no need to spook the kid. Now, kid, you're ready to tell us everything you know, right?

Hero: Right!

JET 1: So...tell us.

Hero: Uh...um...the capital of Japan is Tokyo! And there's the Diet, and an Emporer, and they meet at the, um, the Tokyo Tower, to pass laws about the height of Mount Fuji, which is also know as Mr. Fuji and has 36 views?

JET 1: 36 you say? Keep talking.

Hero: Right. And...and...Japan is an archipelago which means "rising sun", and 85% of the country is mountains, trees, and hot springs, and there's a dire shortage of English teachers there and...

JET 2: QUIT SCREWING AROUND AND TELLING US THINGS WE ALREADY KNOW! NOW TALK!

Hero (getting faster): Talking! Yessir, talking, and that's why you need English teachers there is to help with the agricultural industry, whose primary exports are fish and automobiles, and to help solve the trade imbalance between imports of American cartoons and exports of Japanese comic books-

JET 2 (leaning closer): AND?

Hero: ...and no one is allowed in the country who isn't under the age of 25 due to the BR act...

JET 2 (right in their face): AND?

Hero: ...and that's why Jimmy the Squirrel sent me here in order to prove myself loyal by sailing to Japan on a cargo ship and disguising myself as an ordinary English teacher and becoming the coach of a sport that probably has something to do with giant robots also and to figure out exactly why it is people like pachinko so much over there I mean it's not even a game it's just a way of exchanging currency into small metal balls that you immediately drop everywhere and then I'll use my intensive background in those two Japanese history classes I took and my 2.7 grade point average to forge an emotional connection with each and every student in the country, even the scary ones with pompadours, and English teaching will flow out of my heart like a pure river of firey learning and OH GOD PLEASE THAT'S ALL I KNOW THAT'S ALL I KNOW!

(Hero covers their face and breaks into sobs. JET 2 leans back, arms crossed.)

JET 1: Well, kid, I guess if that's all you know, that's all you know. Now scram!

(Hero looks up.)

JET 2: You heard the man, GET OUT OF HERE!

(Hero bolts out of the chair and exits the stage. JET 2 motions off to the side and the house lights come back up. There's a pause.)

JET 2: Hee hee! God, I love doing that to the nervous ones!

JET 1: Spill it! Hah! That was priceless.

(The two pause to enjoy a good chuckle. After a moment, JET 2 sighs happily, then walks over to the edge of the stage while JET 1 fetches two more chairs off stage. Nihongo walks in, beaming.)

Nihongo: Ohayou, (JET 1)-sensei, (JET 2)-sensei!

(Hand shakes all around, Nihongo sits comfortably in their chair, legs crossed, as JETs 1 and 2 settle in across from them. Cue a short conversation entirely in Japanese. It's very jokey, with lots of laughing, Nihongo occasionally giving off an "aww, shucks" vibe. Things wrap up quickly, everyone stands up, Nihongo shakes one hand, then does an elaborate series of snaps, finger clasps, high fives, and such with the other before strutting back off stage.)

JET 1: Man, you just don't get candidates like that nowadays.

JET 2: Utterly confident! My god, I wish we had a hundred more like 'em. Next!

(Culture-san walks in, bows, and is offered a seat. JET 1 consults their paper again.)

JET 1: So, (Culture-san's name), I understand that you were in charge of your university's Japanese Friendship Society?

Culture: Yes sir, it was my honor to lead that organization for five

years.

JET 2: I thought you graduated in four years.

Culture: I snuck into meetings during high school.

JET 2: Ah. And, what did your organization achieve under your leadership?

Culture: We engaged in an aggressive outreach program, designed to better acquaint the general student body with the myriad delights Japanese traditional culture has to offer through a series of demonstrations, workshops, rallies, marches, and sit-ins.

JET 1: Sit-ins?

Culture: Fortunately, those were no longer necessary once our members seized control of student government. I refer you to formal request for treaty discussions submitted to our humble group by the Board of Directors, as included in my application packet as Appendix B.

JET 2: I...see. So, you've dedicated yourself rather seriously to Japanese culture.

Culture: I prefer to think of it as immersion, but yes, I have taken pains to educate not only myself but others. In particular, I feel that I have excelled in flower arranging, the tea ceremony - including our introduction of the Sweet Tea Ceremony to Allen & Sons Barbecue - calligraphy, archery, and, of course, seppuku.

JET 1: Seppuku.

Culture: Yes.

JET 2: Ritual suicide.

Culture: Indeed. I practiced regularly, every Tuesday and Saturday night.

JET 1: Practiced? You can't have practiced.

Culture: Of course I did. What else was the Carolina Seppuku Fancier's Society supposed to do?

JET 2: You had a club devoted to killing yourself?

Culture: I was All-State Champion three years running and I am pleased to report that we won the Nationals in 2006.

JET 1: That's...astonishing. Well, I'm certainly glad to see you weren't injured during your, um, studies.

Culture: No, no, of course not. I certainly didn't get hurt.

(Pause)

Culture: I can offer a demonstration if you like.

JET 2: No!

JET 1: No, no, that's quite alright.

Culture: You're sure now? I can assure you that you won't feel a thing-

JET 2: No need! That's...no. Um...

JET 1: Well, er, it looks like it's time for the next interviewee!

JET 2: Yes! Yes, it is. Thank you very much (Culture-san's name), if you would just step outside and let the next candidate know that we're ready for them...

(Culture stands up, gives them a deep bow, and shuffles off stage. The two JET interviewers collapse into their chairs.)

JET 1: Well, look on the bright side. The other two can't possibly be as frightening as that one.

(Otaku bursts onto the stage and speaks in a bold, strident voice.)

Otaku: I'm only going to say this once, so listen up! I, friends, have a mission, a sacred duty, and there's nothing on either side of this petty little globe that's going to stop me. You see, there's a magical place that sings to me and I must heed it's siren call. It is the Disneyland to my Superbowl champion. It is the Big Rock Candy Mountain to my inner hobo. It is, in short, the Mecca to all those who heed the summons of contemporary Japanese popular culture. I refer, of course, to Akihabara, the gushing font of all that is sacred and beautiful. I will stride it's shining avenues like a giant among other fans! It's gachapon machines will open up to me, pouring out it's treasures to be sorted by my followers! I will be known on a first name basis in every maid cafe in the city! I will present as an organization at Comiket! I will build towering structures reaching up to the heavens made entirely out of naughty comic books! I will learn once and for all exactly what "moe" means! In short, I will achieve the dream of a lifetime, of all lifetimes, and become the once and future otaku, and the sooner you realize this, the sooner you can help me become one with my destiny! I expect your answer shortly. Thank you and good day!

(Otaku heads off stage. The interviewers stare at his departure. After a moment, Straight Man pokes their head in off stage.)

Straight: Excuse me, but I seem to be the last one left. Are you ready to interview-

JET 1: Tell you what. You agree not to tell anyone and we'll just skip the formalities. You're in, kid. Now, get out.

Straight: Oh! Um, thanks!

(Straight exits the stage and there's a short pause.)

JET 2: If I ever volunteer for this again, shoot me.

(Dim lights, clear stage, have the five applicants standing on stage, raise lights. JET 1 walks in from off-stage.)

JET 1: Right, I know you've all been waiting anxiously for the results of your interviews-

Hero: It's been, like, a minute.

Straight (elbowing Hero): But, a very, very tense minute!

JET 1: Well, we won't keep you guys in suspense any longer. Congratulations! You've all been accepted!

Nihongo: Yatta!

Otaku: Naturally.

Hero: Oh, thank god.

Straight (deadpan): I'm completely shocked.

Culture: Thank you so much for the wonderful opportunity!

JET 1: Yeah, yeah. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to the bar where my partner already has a head start on me in our pursuit of sweet oblivion.

(JET 1 flees the stage, the cast cheers, cue "Jet" by Wings)
(Man, choreography for this one is going to be a bitch. I've heavily truncated the song, so there are two verses, lots of yelling "JET!", and not much else; I don't think the gag needs to go much longer. "JET" should cue early, after the opening half-minute of guitar noodling.)

All: JET! JET! JET!

Otaku: I remember the looks on all of their faces
When they learned that I'd be teaching English in Japan
And JET, thank you for helping me make it to the promised land

All: JET! Ooh! JET! Ooh! JET!

Straight Man: Never thought that I could use my college major
Until I learned this exchange gig could get me there yet
And JET, I gambled on my major and I won that bet

All: JET! Ooh! JET! Ooh!

OH: And JET, I hope that you won't rue the day that we first met!

All: JET!

(Cast poses triumphantly, dim lights)

(Raise lights to Hero and Straight sitting side by side in chairs, facing the audience.)

Hero: Man, I can't believe we're on our way! Why, we're just a hop, a

skip, and a jump from our exciting new careers!

Straight: Yes, a mere twelve-hour hop, skip, and jump.

Hero: Oh, I'm sure the time will just fly right on by!

(Flight Attendant enters the stage.)

FA: Don't be so sure about that kid. Now, did you two pay for Business Class seating?

Straight: Alas, no.

FA: Okay, hold on. (Yelling off-stage.) Hey, give me a hand here!

(A stage hand comes over and helps the FA shove the two chairs as close together as possible, leaving Hero and Straight squished completely against each other, and not in a fun way.)

FA: There, that's better. (Steps off to the side.) Alright, everybody, listen up! Keep your seatbelts on and stay seated when I tell you to and we won't have any trouble. In the event of a crash landing or water landing, you're probably all going to die. But, hey, feel free to read the little card in front of you if it makes you feel better. Oh, and if we lose cabin pressure, you'd better hope we remembered to refill the oxygen tanks. The pilot likes to use the stuff when he's huffing laughing gas. Questions before we take off?

Hero: Excuse me, but when you get a chance could I get a cup of water?

FA: No.

Hero: What about meals? We'll be served meals on the flight won't we?

(FA starts laughing and exits the stage.)

Hero: Right? Meals? Hello?

Straight: Don't worry, you're better off without 'em.

Hero: Okay, so maybe this won't be as pleasant a flight as I'd hoped after all.

Straight: Oh, it could be worse. After all, at least we're seated next to each other. Imagine how some of the other folks on the plane are doing.

(Straight and Hero dash out of their chairs off stage as Nihongo and an extra rush on to replace them.)

Extra: So, you're part of the JET Program too, huh? Isn't this exciting?

Nihongo: (Japanese.)

Extra: Man, you're really into all this, aren't you? We're not even off the ground and you're already completely dedicated to practicing the language!

Nihongo: (More Japanese.)

Extra: Right, um, I'm afraid my own Japanese abilities are a tad rusty, and I'm having trouble keeping up with you. There'll be plenty of time to speak the lingo when we're over there, so maybe you could, um, speak English for a bit insted?

(Nihongo grins and nods.)

Extra: Great!

Nihongo: (Still more Japanese.)

Extra: Aw, hell.

(Extra and Nihongo dive off stage and are replaced by Culture and Otaku.)

Otaku: So, as I was saying, it's not that I don't respect Naruto as a shounen action series - I mean, how could I? It's a classic, and I'm right there watching it every week, if only for my regular dose of sweet, sweet Sakura. Mmmmmmm. Sakura. Oh, sorry, got distracted for a moment. No, much as I like the series, it's just that it doesn't have the epic scope, the grandeur, the...the weight of an immortal classic like Dragonball.

Culture: Excuse me, flight attendant?

(FA walks on.)

FA: Yes?

Culture: I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but you need to move me to another seat immediately, lest there be some...unpleasantness.

(FA looks at Otaku who looks back at FA.)

FA: Okay. Follow me.

(FA leads Culture off-stage, returning with Nihongo in tow. Nihongo sits down and exchanges a stare with Otaku.)

Otaku: I'm not embarassed to admit that I cried - absolutely cried - during End of Evangelion. Hideaki Anno spoke directly to me and my generation about the despair and ennui of modern life and his message touched me, right here. (Points at heart.)

Nihongo: (Long sentence in Japanese.)

(Beat.)

Otaku: You know, I consider it a crime that an American company - especially one as complicit in the downfall of modern animation as Disney - would dare - dare! - to dub the genius of Hayao Miyazaki.

Nihongo: Hai.

(Dim lights, clear stage, assemble five JET members, raise lights. JET 1 walks on from off-stage.)

JET 1: Good morning, everyone! Welcome to the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program orientation session! As a former JET myself, I'll be giving you all the skinny about the program and the year ahead of you!

Hero: You were a JET? Was it awesome or was it totally awesome?

JET 1: Heh. Well, it was...let's just say it was an experience.

Culture: Oh? Where were you stationed?

JET 1: I taught at a small, exclusive school on the Ogasawara Islands.

Otaku: Wait just one moment, my good man. Do you mean to say that you taught English at the famed, the legendary...

JET 1: Yeah, they sent me to Monster Island.

Nihongo: Sugoi!

Straight: Wow. What was it like?

(JET 1 approaches the stage and faces the audience.)

JET 1: Alright, class, I hope you all practiced your reading this weekend...

(Sound effect: Godzilla's roar cuts the JET off as he stars in dismay at the audience.)

JET 1: ...but, if you didn't, don't worry because that's totally okay. In fact, why don't we take the day off, okay? Okay.

(JET 1 shakes his head and steps back to where the cast is.)

JET 1: I don't want to talk about it.

(Beat.)

JET 1: But, enough about me, let's talk about the many challenges and adventures that will be facing you as a JET! In particular, before we go any further there's an important safety issue I need to go over with you.

Culture: Safety? I was under the impression that Japan was exceptionally safe. With the exception of perfectly understandable accidents that could possibly happen when handling razor-sharp swords, not that I'd know anything about that.

JET 1: In general, Japan is as safe as your own living room, depending on what kind of living room you have. But, there's one particularly savage crime that you may find yourself face to face with, and we've gotta make sure you're ready to handle it should the matter arise. Here, make yourselves at home and watch this entertaining and informative video that we've made for you.

(Dim lights, cue film. Again, I'll work out the exact script later.)

(Cue opening fanfare)

The Japanese/American Saftey Institute proudly presents:

Living in Japan Series #238 - KANCHO: Threat or Menace?

The beautiful island nation of Japan is home to many fine traditions and a cultural heritage that has endured for hundreds upon hundreds of years.

(Menacing musical sting.)

However, there is a darker side to the Japanese mindset. In particular, this seemingly innocent land has become a hotbed of activity for that most horrendous of godless, Communist practices: the dreaded Kancho.

(We need an illustration of two hands clasped together, fingers extended, labelled "Fig. 1 - The Kancho".)

For those of you who have been spared the horror so far, Kancho is the act of clasping your hands, extending your index fingers, and then jamming them straight into someone's butt. Yes, that's right, your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues, even - and especially! - seemingly innocent schoolchildren are plotting as we speak to practice amateur proctology against your will.

(Video: Gleefully exaggerated depictions of kancho, with angry classical music punctuating each successful attack.)

Originally introduced to Japan by Bolshevik agents, this degenerate practice has spread far and wide, to the point where no one is safe. You could be minding your own business, quietly making the world safe for democracy, when suddenly that world will come crashing down around you, and you find yourself face to face with the kancho menace.

How can you protect yourself from this insidious threat? Wearing protective body armor is one method, though this may prove unweildy and can chaffe uncomfortably.

(Show someone stuffing a textbook into their pants.)

No, as ever, the best defense against commies is a good offense. So, if some miscreant dare try to use their kancho to climb your Mt. Niitaka, there's only one solution: to give as good as you get. Feel free to turn right around and kancho the little bastard so hard they hit the ceiling. And when you do, tell him Uncle Sam sent you!

(Cue triumphant outro.)

Tune in next week for Living In Japan Series #239 - Delinquent Schoolgirls and How to Meet Them!

(End film raise lights.)

JET 1: Right, any questions?

Straight: You're kidding, right?

JET 1: I wish I were. Why, when I was a JET, I confess to having been the victim of a kancho or two myself. (Beat.) Fortunately, modern medicine has been able to work marvels and my limp is hardly noticeable anymore.

Otaku: I am strangely intrigued and wish to study this topic further.

Hero: My god, we're all going to die.

JET 1: No, you'll just wish you were. Right, well, I guess that's about it - you're ready for your assignments!

Straight: That's it?

JET 1: Eh, I could go over a bunch of other boring stuff, but, really, you're so jet lagged you can hardly pay attention anyway and it's more exciting to be thrown in off the deep end. Besides...

(JET 1 begins singing acapella.)

When you're a Jet,
You're a Jet all the way
From your first cigarette
To your last dyin' day!

When you're a Jet,
If the spit hits the fan,
You got brothers around,
You're a family man...

Otaku: Woah, woah, woah, woah, woah! Excuse me, sir, but we have already reached our quota of West Side Story songs for this particular musical! I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to cease!

JET 1: Oh! Terribly sorry, I wasn't informed. Right, here are your assignments. Best of luck to all of you!

(JET 1 distributes envelopes to everyone, then strolls off stage whistling "Jet Song" as everyone tears into their assignments.)

Nihongo: Ha! Takemiya Keiko Shounen Gakuen! (Turning and bowing to the others.) Gambatane, mina-chan! (Leaves stage.)

Hero: That guy (or gal) gives me the creeps, man.

Otaku: Hrm! There appears to have been some sort of error!

Straight: Dare we ask?

Otaku: According to this document, I have been assigned to an all male private academy in Hokkaido!

Culture: That sounds like a perfectly prestigious assignment to me.

Otaku: Prestigious? A school populated entirely by men? I suppose I

could have made do with Hokkaido as a location - no doubt the local fan community is exceptionally tight knight and the weather during the winter would certainly be conducive to assembling model kits, drawing comics, and dreaming of summer Comic Markets to come. But, to suffer the indignity of no - I repeat! - no sailor suits whatsoever? Not even a single female school uniform in sight to sustain my spirits and provide the elusive sensation known as "moe"? I think not!

Hero: Well, it's a bit late to do anything about it, don't you think?

Otaku: Not at all! I shall simply have to go directly to the top and let them know my displeasure. Now, if you will excuse me, I am off to Tokyo, to seek out the JET board of directors at their offices in the Shibuya Mandarake.

Hero: Um, they aren't at Mandarake. That's just a big fanboy store.

Otaku: Nonetheless, that is where my search must begin! I bid you all a fond adieu. (Exits stage.)

Culture: I suppose some people simply will not be happy, no matter what sort of opportunities come their way. I, on the other hand, am thrilled to be teaching at the (glances at their sheet) Sakura Technical Night School in Kobe, which I'm quite sure is an institution of distinction. (Wanders off-stage.)

Straight: I wonder what sort of distinction. Meanwhile, looks like I'm at the Ikeda Ryouko Middle School, right outside of Osaka. Not too shabby! Dare I ask what your own fate is?

Hero: Let's see...Mishima Yukio Memorial High School in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Well, that should be cool, I guess. Maybe.

Straight: Be cool, o boon companion. I'm sure it's going to rock. Right, if I'm going to be there for school tomorrow I've got a train to catch. Here. (The two hug.) Give 'em hell for me! (Walks off stage.)

Hero: You bet! No problem! I'm on the case! Yessiree!

(Beat.)

Hero: Oh, god, what have I done?

(Dim lights and clear stage. Raise lights as Hero and the Teaching Assistant walk onto stage where the Principal is waiting.)

TA: ...and I'm pleased to introduce Principal Morita.

Principal: Konichawa, (Hero's name)-san! (Bows)

Hero: Oh, um, yes, pleased, yes! (Bows clumsily)

(The Principal, looking pleased, begins to hold forth in Japanese.)

Hero: Um...

(Principal continues.)

Hero: Er, I don't suppose you could slow down a bit...

(Principal continues.)

Hero: Okay, hold on. Wait. LOOK, EVERYBODY JUST HOLD ON A SECOND, OKAY?

(Principal and TA freeze in place.)

Hero: DIRECTOR!

(Cat walks onto stage.)

Cat: What is it that couldn't wait until the end of the scene?

Hero: Listen, I'm sorry but I can't understand a thing this guy is saying.

Cat: So? Your character isn't meant to.

Hero: Yeah, I know, but I feel kinda bad that he's there giving me this big introductory welcome speech and I'm not getting any of it. I don't suppose you could turn on the subtitles or something?

Cat: Hold on, let me see what I can do. Meanwhile, get back to it, okay?

Hero: Sure thing. Thanks!

Cat: Yeah, yeah. Action!

(The TA and Principal unfreeze and the Principal takes a moment to get up to speed (ala a record starting mid-song) before jumping back into his speech as Cat walks off stage. A moment later a voice starts speaking over the wireless mike; the Principal continues, but speaks softly.)

Announcer: ...and it is with great satisfaction that I welcome you here to Mishima where I'm sure you'll prove to be a truly exemplary English teacher. While I am sure I will have many other occasions to say this, allow me to thank you in advance for all your hard work!

Hero: You bet, my man.

(The Principal smiles, they bow to each other, and the Principal walks off stage.)

TA: Now that he's gone, let me make the deal clear.

Hero: Deal?

TA: This is how it will work. Normally I would be supervising your classes. Instead, I will be at the pachinko parlor and you will make sure no one leaves or sets anything on fire until the end of the class. If asked, I am there every day. Got it?

Hero: Yes?

TA: Good. (Leaves stage.)

Hero: So, I'm already being thrown to the wolves. Terrific. I wonder how things are going for everyone else?

(Dim lights, clear stage, repeat the same set up with the same TA and Principal. To distinguish them as different characters, they are wearing large fake moustaches. Meanwhile, Hero has been replaced by Nihongo.)

TA: ...and I'm pleased to introduce Principal Shiroei.

Principal: Good afternoon, Mr./Miss. (Nihongo's Last Name)! (Offers hand.)

Nihongo: Konichiwa, Shiroei-sensei! (Shakes hand.)

Principal (In careful English): It is my great pleasure to introduce you to our school in your own language!

Nihongo: Domo arigato gozaimasu!

Principal: I feel it is important to spend as much time as possible speaking English with everyone here, students and teachers alike, in order to provide continual immersion for our studies.

Nihongo: Hai, sou desu!

Principal: You too should feel free to speak English.

Nihongo: Hai! (Figure out "Absolutely!" in Japanese.)

Principal: You should start immediately.

Nihongo: ("Of course, I agree!" in Japanese.)

Principal: I SPENT ALL WEEK STUDYING ENGLISH IN ORDER TO GREET YOU AND YOU WILL DO ME THE COURTESY OF REPLYING IN KIND BEFORE I AM FORCED TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE!

(Beat.)

Nihongo: ("Yessir, absolutely, English it is!")

Principal: ARGH!

(The Principal snaps and charges at Nihongo who runs off stage, both of them being pursued by a distressed Ahing and Uming TA. Dim lights momentarily, then raise them to an empty stage. Raise lights, then play a school bell ringing - perhaps the one we used in Eva! - as Hero walks to the center front of the stage and addresses the audience.)

Hero: Ahem. Ah, good afternoon class!

(Pause as he waits for the audience to greet him. COUP members up front should be given the heads up to reply to Our Hero loudly and enthusiastically when directly addressed in order to encourage the rest of the crowd. Hero may need to ad lib gentle prodding to the "class" periodically, ala the following.)

Hero: That was terrible, Come on, let's try that again. Good afternoon, class!

(Hopefully the audience responds this time, else all is lost. Well, let's be optimistic, shall we?)

Hero: There, much better. Ahem. Well, my name is (Hero's last name)-sensei and I'll be teaching you all English this year! I want to start off by seeing where you all are with your pronunciation, so I'll go over this handy Ministry of Education approved word list and you guys repeat what I say, okay? (Audience.) Okay. Ahem. Here we go.

Octopus!
Triumvirate!
Uvula!
Afficionado!
Studebaker! Studebaker? Huh.
Classified documentation!
Fornication...no, wait, let's skip that one.
Cyclops!
Badger!
Alliegence or death!
Big Fire!
Rococo!
Black lung disease!
Wankel Rotary Engine?

(Hero looks confused, then tosses the sheet aside.)

Cat!
Hat!
Red!
Blue!
Fee!
Fi!
Fo!
Fum!
One!
Two!
One, two, three, four!

(Launch into "Minnie the Moocher", which Our Hero will perform straight using the same call and response phrasing as The Blues Brothers. Choreography is easy - watch video of Cab Calloway in action and do what he does. Here's hoping the audience gets the joke and plays along. Meanwhile, these lyrics need a bit of editing, but it's what I found off the web on short notice.)

Hey folks heres the story bout minnie the moocher
She was a lowdown hoochie coocher
She was the roughest toughest frail
But minnie had a heart as big as a whale

Hidehidehidehi (hidehidehidehi)
Hodehodehodeho (hodehodehodeho)
Hedehedehedehe (hedehedehedehe)

Hidehidehideho (hidehidehideho)

She messed around with a bloke named smokie
She loved him though he was cokey
He took her down to chinatown
And showed her how to kick the gong around

Hidehidehidehi (hidehidehidehi)
Whoah (whoah)
Hedehedehedehe (hedehedehedehe)
A hidehidehideho (hidehidehideho)

She had a dream about the king of sweden
He gave her things that she was needin
He gave her a home built of gold and steel
A diamond car with platinum wheels

A hidehidehidehidehidehidehidehi (hidehidehidehidehidehidehi)
Hodehodehodehodehodehodeho (hodehodehodehodehodehodeho)
... (...)
... (...)

He gave her his townhouse and his racing horses
Each meal she ate was a dozen courses
Had a million dollars worth of nickels and dimes
She sat around and counted them all a million times

Hidehidehidehi (hidehidehidehi)
Hodehodehodeho (hodehodehodeho)
Hedehedehedehe (hedehedehedehe)
Hidehidehideho (hidehidehideho)

Poor Min! Poor Min! Poor Min!

(Dim lights. Setup stage with two chairs, a table, and drink glasses.
Our Hero and the Straight Man are sitting there nursing their sorrows.)

Hero: Is it really a mid-term party for all the JET members if you and I
are the only ones who could make it?

Straight: When it's the all-you-can-drink-for-2000-yen happy hour, you
bet it is. Besides, aren't you feeling festive? Don't you relish the
opportunity to celebrate your teaching career? How's that going for you,
anyway?

Hero: Wait, I need to drink more before I can bring myself to answer that
question. (Tips back glass.) Okay. Do I have to answer it now, or can I
have another drink first?

Straight: Come on, fess up.

Hero: It's...it's a bit different than I expected.

Straight: Ha!

Hero: Yeah, I know, you tried to tell me, but, I didn't really think it
would be quite so...

Straight: Weird?

Hero: Normal.

Straight: You're kidding me.

Hero: No, seriously. Things got off to a really strange start - don't get me started on my non-existent TA and their savage pachinko habit - but now things are chugging along nicely. My apartment is the same size as my old dorm room, which is strangely comforting, and I spend my spare time there playing RPGs which is what I did most of my Senior year anyway. The junk food at the convenience store down the street is cheap, tasty, and entirely without nutritional benefit, so that's like being at home, too.

Straight: I thought Japanese food would be the death of you. I mean, you were the only starving college student I knew that didn't like ramen.

Hero: Eh, I still don't, but there's a lot to be said for curry bread and hot dumplings. Also, I've become a regular at the Mister Doughnut next to my train station. It's no Krispy Kreme, of course, but it's incredibly convenient and I don't have to spend a half-hour waiting in line for a freakin' doughnut. Well, technically a dozen freakin' doughnuts, but you know what I mean.

Straight: How about work? You've never held down a job for longer than two weeks and it's been five months. I figured you'd be broken against the wheel of adult responsibility by now.

Hero: Things were pretty rough until I realized that most of my lessons could be spent just reading aloud and that no one was checking up to make sure I was following the suggested book guidelines. I just spent a very pleasant week reading the Harry Potter books to all of my classes. Next up: Star Wars novels!

Straight: Don't take this the wrong way, but I'm pretty sure I hate you.

Hero: But, I thought you hated the Harry Potter series.

Straight: No, it's not that. It's just that...I can't believe this is going so easy for you while I'm killing myself down there.

Hero: Wait, this was your dream job wasn't it?

Straight: Oh, sure it was...until I realized that I wasn't expected to teach English so much as I was asked to ride herd on a small army of hormone soaked middle school kids whose only goal in life is to make me suffer.

Hero: Aw, I'm sure they're boistrous...

Straight: I swear that my ass is plastered with concentric circles I've been kancho'd so many times.

Hero: ...and the system is a bit strange, but you're still teaching 'em English!

Straight: My TA keeps vetoing my lesson plans, leaving me to fall back on reading aloud.

Hero: Fun, ain't it?

Straight: Not when you're reading biology textbooks.

Hero: I can loan you my Star Wars novels if you like.

Straight: I should be so lucky. You know, I hate to say this, especially after the ribbing I gave you, but this...it just isn't what I expected.

(Straight Man stands up)

Straight Man:

They said joining the JET Program was the best thing I could do
Oh the good work I could do, start my life anew!
Screw it! I blew it! Oh to hell with it!
I remember when i signed up I ws thrilled to get two years
How the time would fly, two years
But six months into it
And I'm ready to quit!

(Our Hero stands and walks across to the straight man.)

Our Hero:

(Straight Man's name), it takes time to get adjusted!

Straight Man

You'd be enriching young lives, that's what they said
Looks good on a resume, that's what they said
Go immerse in the culture and earn some bread
Why sit around at home being a bum
When you could travel 'round the world and become
An English teacher!

An English teacher, an English teacher
Why on Earth am I an English teacher?
I thought that I'd be pursuing my dreams
That I had found my vocation
And that I knew what life means
I could go get my masters, my life in order
Instead I'm a human tape recorder
Everyday is full of chaos and strife
Working with middle school students
Wrangling middle school students
Trying not to kill those damn students!
The English teacher's life!

Oh, (SM's name), I told you as soon as the kids get used to you...

Straight Man

You said it before, (Our Hero's name)!

And it ws goodbye, Mr. Chips
And hello Blackboard Jungle
Goodbye life I know
Hello to kancho
'Cause when my first week was spent
Reading from a book
Then I knew
We'd been took
I'd be stuck here teaching forever

Really reaching the kids is a tall order
Unlike just being a tape recorder
Every day is full of chaos and strife
Working with middle school students
Wrangling middle school students
Trying not to kill those damn students!
The Eigo sensei's life!

Hero: Why do you always have to make a big production out of everything?

(Straight Man pointedly waves his arm towards the audience.)

Hero: Oh, yeah. Still, you have to try to look on the bright side of things.

Straight: Alright, wise guy. How?

Hero: There's always the possibility that someone out there is suffering more than you are. Just think of the other JETs who couldn't be there tonight. If they can't get out of town for the purpose of drinking heavily with the two of us, just imagine how difficult things must be for them!

Straight: I suppose that, even when you're at rock bottom, there's always schadenfreude to bring you through. I wonder what's happening with the other three...

(Dim lights and clear stage. Three chairs are set up with our punk thugs sitting - or, more accurately, slouching - in them, facing the audience. Culture is alongside them, also facing the audience, or at least the microphones.)

Culture: Good morning, class. Today we will be discussing the correlation between the Golden Week holidays in Japan and the celebration of May Day-

(The thugs all groan and look disgruntled.)

Culture: Now, class, I feel that as we learn English together we must also explore the many fascinating links between Western and Japanese culture as part of the educational process.

Thug 1, in Japanese: You can shove your process.

Culture: I'm sorry, Mister Yammamori, but we speak English in this classroom. Now...what was it that you said?

(Thug 1 mutters "shove it" in English. Culture walks up behind their chair.)

Culture: I must insist that you speak up. Again - tell me.

(Thug 1 stands and gets in Culture's face.)

Thug 1: Shove it!

(Thugs 2 and 3 snicker loudly as Thug 1 looks triumphant. Beat.)

Culture (to Thugs 2 and 3): I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I'm afraid I have a little disciplinary matter to discuss with Mr. Yammamori. Would you please excuse us for a moment.

(Culture drags Thug 1 off-stage, with Thug 1 screaming protests, then howling in agony when out of sight of the audience. A moment later, Culture returns to the stage without Thug 1.)

Culture: I'm sorry for that unpleasant disruption, class. Now, are we ready to resume our discussion?

(Thugs 2 and 3 nod enthusiastically, practically falling over themselves to be agreeable.)

Culture: And we aren't going to have any other outbursts, are we?

(Thugs agree even more frantically.)

Culture: Excellent. Now, as I was saying...

(Dim lights, clear stage, leaving one chair off to the side.) Nihongo is teaching by addressing the audience directly. A COUP plant in the front row will be used in this scene. As the lights come up, Nihongo is happily chattering along in Japanese. The COUP plant is given a microphone.)

COUP Plant, raising hand: Ano...

(Nihongo ignores them and keeps going on.)

COUP Plant: Ano...excuse me, sensei.

Nihongo: Hai?

(Nihongo hands off the mic and walks onto stage, confronting Nihongo.)

COUP: I was wondering when we were going to start speaking English, sensei.

(Nihongo laughs.)

Nihongo (In Japanese): Don't worry, don't worry! We will speak English later. Today, we will speak Japanese.

COUP: But, this is an English class, sensei.

Nihongo (In Japanese): Of course it's an English class! And I am your English teacher! And I'm saying we'll speak English later.

COUP: It's halfway through the school year and you have yet to teach us English, sensei.

Nihongo (In Japanese): Of course, I have! You're speaking wonderful English! No problem!

COUP: The tests, sensei! You have to prepare us for the tests!

Nihongo (In Japanese): Yes, we will prepare together for the tests.

COUP: I'm sorry, Sensei, but you leave us no choice. (Off-stage, not at the audience.) Now!

(Other COUP members rush on stage and restrain Nihongo by pushing them into the chair, tying them to it, and shoving a gag in their mouth, Nihongo struggles against this, falling over if they feel they're up to pratfalls.)

COUP: Ahem. Now, everyone, let us turn to chapter one of our textbooks...

(Dim lights, clear stage. We return to the setup for Culture's classroom, with three chairs facing the front, this time with only Thugs 2 and 3 sitting in them, looking nervous. Culture continues to teach by pacing a bit, speaking towards the audience/mics rather than the students directly.)

Culture: And now it's your turn, Mr. Hirono. Please turn to page XX in your Dashiell Hammett and continue reading where Mr. Sakai left off.

*** I still need to make a selection, but I'll include a sequence of suitably hard-boiled prose here shortly. Thug 2 stands and reads this haltingly, with Culture occasionally offering corrections for unfamiliar words or slang. I may substitute Elmore Leonard for Hammett, but you get the idea. ***

Culture: Very good, Mr. Hirono, you may be seated. Now, before we dismiss class, I'd like to point out a rather disturbing trend that I've noticed regarding participation in after school activities. Despite my best efforts, attendance in the Sakura Technical Flower Arranging Society has not been as it should. I feel that both of you would be valuable additions to our membership and I look forward to seeing you both at tomorrow night's session.

(Thugs groan and look visibly agitated.)

Culture: Now, now, I'm sure we all understand the importance of involvement in school activities. After all, we wouldn't want to display an inappropriate attitude towards learning, such as that of Mr. Yamamori, now would we?

(Culture looks towards the empty chair. Thugs 2 and 3 slide their chairs away from it, lest they be connected.)

Culture: Excellent. I'll look forward to seeing you at tomorrow's meeting!

Thug 3, looking nervous: But...sensei...

Culture: Yes, Mr. Sakai?

Thug 3: We...we just don't like flower arranging!

Culture: Now, now, I believe I've worked very hard with the class to provide lessons of interest to you, such as today's reading assignment. Surely it can't hurt for you to accommodate me in this minor, yet essential, matter, lest some unfortunate accident occur, such as the one that befell certain other students in this class...

(Thugs look at the empty chair, back to Culture, back to the chair, and then at each other, torn. Finally, Thug 2 musters up the courage to stand up.)

Thug 2: I'd like to offer a deal, sensei!

Culture: A deal?

Thug 2: We'll go to flower arranging if...if you...if you join us for the motorcycle club!

(There's a long tense moment, Thug 2 looking like he's about to be attacked at any moment.)

Culture: Hrm. I suppose that it would only be fair for me to share in your interests as well as encouraging you in exploring my own. After all, I'm quite sure that, strange as it seems, even this...motorcycle club offers valuable insight into contemporary Japanese society. Very well! Tell me more about this club of yours.

(Dim lights, adjust stage. This time, the three chairs are set around a small table, with a vase and flower on top. Two COUP women in maid outfits are standing there, looking loli-tastic as all get out. Otaku walks in from off-stage and is instantly greeted by bowing maids.)

Maids: Okaerinasai, goshujin-sama! (NOTE: Check phrasing.)

Otaku: Now, now, my dears, we've discussed this before! I, as you know, am an English teacher, and if I'm going to hold my office hours in this fine establishment, it is vitally important that we all speak English together, yes? Yes! Now, one more time, if you would be so kind!

Maids: Welcome home, master!

Otaku: That's more like it! Now, if one of you would be so kind as to fetch me my usual, we can begin today's lesson!

(One of the maids rushes off to the side and returns with a drink of some sort - perhaps a bottle of Ramune - while Otaku is led to his seat by the other maid with much bowing and pampering. Otaku, stretches out, looking entirely content with his lot in life.)

Otaku: Excellent, excellent! Now, have you both be studying as I have instructed you to?

Maids: Yes, master!

Otaku: And you're keeping up with your readings in the Tokyopop editions of those ever so select Japanese comic volumes that I have provided for your edification?

Maids: Yes, master!

Otaku: Wonderful! Now, today I believe we shall engage in a bit of casual conversation, in order to further hone your fluency in my native tongue. Let's start with you, my dear (to Maid 1). Tell me, who is it your pleasure to serve in every way possible within the confines of the applicable laws?

Maid 1: You are, master!

Otaku: That is exactly the answer I was looking for! (Maids giggle and applaud.) And (to Maid 2), what services might you offer in this fine establishment?

Maid 2: We serve delicious cakes and drinks...

Otaku (alternating between maids): Yes?

Maid 1: ...and listen to our master's everyday cares and woes...

Otaku: And?

Maid 2: ...and we greet you with the spirit of love in our hearts...

Otaku: Yes, yes, but you're forgetting the most important task of all!

Maid 1: ...and we can give you a foot massage!

Otaku: And that, ladies, is the most useful phrase of English I could possibly hope to ever teach you. Let's go over it again one more time, shall we?

Maids: Please, master, let us give you a foot massage!

Otaku: Top marks all around, my dear students!

(The maids giggle and applaud.)

Otaku: And now, I believe, the moment is ripe for you to provide that very service, as I am weary from many hours wandering throughout the happy halls of Tokyo Big Site, shopping for male-oriented doujinshi geared for the discriminating customer!

(The maids look at each other.)

Maid 1: First, we would like more conversation with you, master!

Otaku: Oh?

Maid 2: Yes, conversation, master!

Otaku: Then it would be my greatest pleasure to indulge the two of you in another instructional lesson in conversational English! What shall we discuss, then? The respective merits of the new shows currently being broadcast as part of this season's television animation? The treasures I have recently discovered at Comic Tora no Ana?

Maid 1: We would like to discuss the bill, master!

Maid 2: Yes, the bill, master!

(The maids applaud, keeping up their cute attitude throughout the rest of the scene.)

Otaku: Um. (beat) Yes, the bill. Well, perhaps later. Meanwhile, wouldn't you rather talk about the latest tchotchkes available at Animate...

Maid 1: The bill is...mmmm...past due! Yes, it is past due, master!

Maid 2: You need to pay the bill immediately, master!

Otaku: Of course, of course, and I'll be happy to do so just as soon as I'm ready to leave after I've had a chance to enjoy delicious cake and your delightful company...

Maid 1: Right now, master!

Maid 2: Or else, master!

Otaku: Er...yes, certainly. Why, just let me get my wallet, which I believe I left near the entrance...

(Otaku bolts off stage. The two maids look at each other.)

Maid 1: And now it is time for...mmmm...

Maid 2: Aggrevated assault!

Maid 1: Yes, aggrevated assault!

(The maids applaud, then reach for baseball bats on the floor beneath the table.)

Maids: Master! Oh, master!

(Weilding bats, the maids exit the stage, giggling. Dim lights.)

Voiceover: Six months later.

(Raise lights. Our Hero and Straight Man are standing in the middle of the stage.)

Hero: Well, this is it. The moment of truth.

Straight Man: The end of year evaluation, god help us all.

Hero: I hope they ask me to stay another year!

Straight Man: I hope they kill me and end my pain.

Hero: Maybe that's what happened to the others. Where are they?

(Nihongo walks in.)

Nihongo: Konichiwa, minna!

Straight: I don't suppose a simple "hello" would kill you, would it?

Nihongo: Nani?

Straight: Oh, never mind.

(Otaku limps in.)

Hero: What happened to you?

Otaku: Regretfully, that is a particularly delicate matter and I fear I must keep my own counsel.

Hero: Huh?

Otaku (raising voice): I don't want to talk about it, okay?

Hero: Okay, okay!

Straight: Well, the gang's all here except for (Culture-san's last name). I wonder where the sacred keeper of traditional Japanese culture has gotten off to?

(Cue Culture, marching in with Thugs 2 and 3 flanking her, dressed out in the finest of thug gear. Leather jacket, jeans (preferably black), sunglasses, swaggering with a bokken over their shoulder.)

Culture, to thugs: If you two would be so kind, I have an appointment that simply cannot be avoided and I'm afraid your presence would not be entirely welcome. I'll meet up with you at the tea house later this afternoon.

Thugs: YES, BOSS!

(Thugs exit stage.)

Nihongo: Sugoi!

Hero: What the hell happened to you?

Culture: Over the past year, my dear students have worked hard not only to learn English, but to teach me about other, more contemporary aspects of life in Japan. This has proven to be an exciting change of pace from my previous studies. It has also given me the opportunity to discover what I really looked for in Japan: the chance to ride a bitchin' hog and

bust heads.

Otaku: I think I'm in love.

Culture: I should warn you that my companions stand ready to return at a moment's notice.

(Enter JET 1.)

JET 1: Well, folks, it's been an exciting year, hasn't it?

Hero: It sure has! Are you here to give us the details about next year's assignments?

JET 1: Yes, about that. Let's see. (Nihongo's last name)!

Nihongo: Hai!

JET 1: It took us a while to figure out exactly what was going on with you, but I think we finally worked it out. You don't actually speak English, do you?

(Beat.)

Nihongo: Ie! (breaks into sobs)

Culture: Oh my.

Straight: It all makes sense now!

Otaku: Sugoi!

JET 1: Yeah, we were so caught up on wondering about your Japanese ability that we forgot about the minor detail of, you know, being able to teach English. Appears (Nihongo) here understands it okay, but can't actually say anything in English herself!

Nihongo, sounding miserable: Hai.

JET 1: So, on the plus side we're going to help line up someone to help teach (Nihongo) English! On the minus side, they aren't going to be doing it here, and we're sending 'em back to the States.

Culture: That's quite a shame.

JET 1: Yes, and speaking of shame, while you did a good job of teaching your students English, we've also had a number of complains from the authorities regarding your behavior over the past few months. Let's see...(consulting sheet) you're being accused of noise violations, shoplifting, a number of assaults including...chain whipping?

Culture: That was a simple accident that occurred while I was repairing my motorcycle, I assure.

JET 1: And the time you tied a rival gang member to the back of your bike and dragged them around the school grounds?

Culture: A regrettable misunderstanding.

JET 1: Yes, well, the police have agreed not to press charges...so long as you leave the country immediately.

Culture: Oh my.

Otaku: Well, dear (Culture)-san, as the proverbial saying goes, "them's the breaks".

JET 1: The police also mentioned you, (Otaku), regarding a series of very large bills you accumulated throughout Tokyo, particularly an astonishing tab at the (consults sheet) "Rabu Rabu Meido Paradise Cafe" in Akihabara?

Otaku: Ah. I can explain...

JET 1: I'm not sure you can explain your failure to show up and teach class at your assigned destination. Those lovely young women were absolutely devastated-

Otaku: Women? Surely you mean "men".

JET 1: Oh, no, there was a misprint on your assignment. That was a terribly prestigious girl's high school you were asked to teach at, and, as mentioned, the students - all of whom were reportedly very excited at having an American man teach them - were heart-broken.

Otaku (sobbing): Why? Why, cruel fate, why?

(Nihongo comforts Otaku, who is utterly heartbroken.)

JET 1: Now, let's see. (Hero)!

Hero: Yessir?

JET 1: You'll be pleased to know that your students absolutely loved you and gave you top marks...

Hero: Yes!

JET 1: ...even after they all blew their final exams.

Hero: Ah. Um...

JET 1: We've talked about it with the principal and, as much as the kids liked you, I'm afraid we aren't offering you the chance to sign up for another term.

Hero: Oh.

JET 1: Sorry about that. If it's any consolation, their Star Wars booth at the spring festival was the most successful in the history of the school. Finally, (Straight Man)...

Straight: Here it comes.

JET 1: By all accounts you had the worst class in the history of Ikeda

Ryouko, but you still managed to beat some English into those little bastards. Congratulations on taking a helluva assignment and making it work! The principal has asked me to convey their strongest desire for you to return next year!

Straight: ...you're kidding me, right?

JET 1: Good job! Of course, if you don't want to teach another year, you don't have to, but we're all hoping you'll stay and not head out with the rest of these bums. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off for a class reunion with the old gang from Monster Island. Let's hope King Ghidra doesn't get drunk and start demanding karaoke again.

(JET 1 exits stage.)

Straight: I don't believe it.

Hero: Congratulations!

Straight: Oh, hey, I'm sorry you didn't get asked back for another round.

Hero: Well, I had the sneaking suspicion that the students might not have been learning as much as they could, even when we were doing vocabulary drills based on Final Fantasy spells. Still, it was a great year, I learned a lot and, who knows, maybe I'll find a way to spend some more time here.

Culture: I feel the same way, assuming I can find away to avoid the immigration authorities.

Otaku: Not to mention the maids. They're most...persistant.

Hero: So...going to stay another year?

Straight: I really don't know. I thought I'd never set foot in that school again and I spent the entire year thinking of how badly I just wanted to go back to the good ol' U.S. of A.

Hero: Ah, but just think of what you'll be missing out on!

(Cue "America")

Our Hero

Oh, fair Nippon
Exotic islands
Archipelago of beauty
Always for you I'll be yearning
Always more of your culture learning

Straight Man

Farewell, Japan
Oh surreal islands
Islands whose secrets elude me
Always my lesson I am learning
Always for the US I'm yearning

And my heart is burning
To be gone from this place
At a much faster pace
Japan is great in small doses
But too much has caused me psychosis!

All

I like to be in America
Back overseas in America
I'm going to flee to America
Lord, get me back to America!

Straight Man

First, Tokyo was a thrill
Now I think it's food for Godzilla

Our Hero

I guess I liked the place okay
Pity they don't want me to stay!

All:

Back at the bar in America
Drink PBR in America
Watching NASCAR in America
Hope it ain't far to America!

Straight Man

The moment I exit my flight
I'm eating steak for a fortnight

Our Hero

I'll buy a melon to gorge on
Without having to mortgage my home!

All:

Drive SUVs in America
Emit PCBs in America
Want MTV in America
It's the life for me in America

Culture

Over my bike gang I lorded

Otaku

Otaku treasures I hoarded

Culture

Our triumphs have been reported

Both

Too bad we're being deported!

All:

Heeding the call of America
Hit up the mall in America
Vast urban sprawl in America
We're missing y'all in America!

Straight Man

I'll hop in my car right away
And drive up and down main street all day!

Our Hero

Our friend will be getting his wish

Nihongo

Hello, I am speaking English!

(Culture and Otaku pat Nihongo on the back and lead him off the stage as America fades out - with whistling, perhaps? - leaving Our Hero and Straight Man on stage.)

Hero: So, you're heading back then.

Straight: I think I'll head home for a visit if nothing else. And then...

Hero: Yeah?

Straight: We'll see.

(Fin.)