

You are here: [Home](#) / [Feature of the Month](#) / Country of Dolls

COUNTRY OF DOLLS

September 29, 2019 by [George Salis](#)

[f Share](#) [t Tweet](#)

In the wake of Japan's apocalypse, tens of millions of incombustible, life-sized dolls were expelled from the ashes. They coughed up charcoal clouds that dispersed into sunlit particles, then balled their fists and brushed the cinders from their eyes. The sky was the color and consistency of oil and marbled with blood clots, the sun a scabrous apparition. The country of dolls suffered from collective amnesia, but the threads of their inner brains possessed instincts based on their former lives, and they began subconsciously rebuilding structures as they existed before. Blackened day and neon night, they toiled without food or drink, and through all forms of weather, including ember downpours, plasmid heatwaves, and gamma ray monsoons. Before long, Japan was restored, an upended echo of itself.

As the dolls settled into daily life, they became intolerant to the capricious and extreme weather. When it rained ashes and embers they wore chainmail raincoats or held aloft metal umbrellas that resisted the ricocheting sparks and protected their fabrics from stains and scuffs. During the ultra-heatwaves, in which the air shimmered like a melting mirage, they carried with them buckets of krypton-green water to quench their limitless thirst and pour over their heads so that their brains became damp. Come gamma ray monsoon season, they took refuge in strange shelters carved into mountains or in the earth itself, left by those who

preceded them, and doll families nestled together, listening to the titanium crackling of the gales and the battery pops of the electric rainfall.

The cities were quickly infested with sheep-sized cockroaches which were later tamed and corralled by farmers. Some were bred for an increase in size and were able to perform the work of four oxen, others were selected for their tender and flavorful meat (if the dolls had possessed such a memory, they would have compared the taste to smoked salmon), while one species was bred for its translucent umami milk, which in order to harvest required a specialized butcher to slice open a pregnant cockroach in the manner of an autopsy, dismantle its embryo, and then extract the gallon of heavenly liquid with a vacuuming device, such insectile sustenance was customarily served with phosphorescent potatoes that were pulled from the ground already baked, another inheritance from those of the past. Many families grew fond of the roaches in their doll-homes, the way the creatures masticated their segmented antennae while grooming, how they clapped their mandibles together like a pair of jubilant hands, or their childish fear of light that sent them scurrying toward irradiated shadows, and so a relatively common sight was a roach on a leash being walked in the mauve twilight, or playing fetch with smoldering rocks.

One could say that the country had reacquired a long-lost tranquility. Robed fathers lounged in their favorite stone chairs after work and exhaled their cigarette smoke through the herringbone stiches of their torsos, mothers knitted gardens and brewed manila hemp tea, daughters played with dolls (not those of fabric or plastic or porcelain, as that was equated with abhorrent sorcery, rather, they played with fleshy, half-conscious homunculi hatched from artificially inseminated roach eggs), sons tortured their sisters' dolls and roughhoused outside until adolescent accidents required a mother's gentle touch, shins or knees sutured, using the same needle for when potty mouths' lips must be sewn together as punishment.

Out of a cryptic obligation, the amnesiac dolls acknowledged the ashen shadows upon the walls and ground, the ikotsu that they at first attempted to conceal with paint or replace with fresh materials, but the human blemishes always resurfaced in the same locations, maintaining their rigid poses. So the dolls would take the time to sync their postures with their past silhouettes, and then gaze into the abraded faces of the absences until they could hear lucifugous whispers, warnings of man's folly and malevolence, the trappings of jingoism and grandiose delusions. A few heeded the disembodied wisdom, while most others touted their holy textiles, proclaiming that men of the cloth, devoid of flesh, were free from evil, above it, pure.

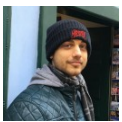
With time, younger couples began to notice the first frays in the cloth around their button eyes, the looseness in the topstitching around their necks, and so they decided to raise children as a ward against mortality, but also as a tribute to life and love. What mothers ultimately birthed made some of them swallow rocks and toss themselves into the nearest body of water while fathers performed seppuku, their snowy stuffing and hosiery bowels spilling onto the floor. The first generation of dolls created through copulation resulted in babies born with third button eyes or clusters of eyelets on their denim foreheads, with cerebral lint leaking from their ears and mouths, with pigtailed intestines, tangled nylon veins, and pulverized porcelain bones, with their spandex hearts or lungs outside of their chests. Many were issued forth as premature fabric bolts the size of a pinkie. Despite the best efforts of experienced teams of surgical tailors and seamstresses, most of the mutated babies died in hospitals outfitted with sterilized looms, sewing machines, knitting needles, and cross-stitching canvases, all futile.

Japan's doll citizens began to question their faith in the goddess Itō. What purpose did it serve to scrap the lives of so many children? Was Itō willing to prevent embroidered imperfections in their DNA, but not able? Then she was unskilled. Was she able, but not willing? Then she was a cruel clothier. Was she both able and willing? Then why did the amigurumi mutations exist? Was she neither able nor willing? Then why call her a goddess? A group of theologians tried to attribute the generational tragedy to an invisible and satanic satin energy that spread through the country and wrought perversity upon whatever came in contact with its tendril threads, but this idea simply avoided the former questions. Eventually, visits to textile temples and crochet churches became infrequent, then rare, until they ceased altogether, and the dolls' spiritual lives became deteriorated papier-mâché. Habiliment scientists in fiber laboratories attempted to address the fertility problem by designing and manufacturing a doll baby in the way of the goddess Itō, but they only succeeded in creating inert effigies without the mysterious ingredient of consciousness. Mystics who claimed to have solved the problem using chakras and the application of chi were ultimately discovered to be charlatans manipulating hand puppets or marionettes.

Meanwhile, it was rumored that Qin Shi Huang, the unliving god and first emperor of China, had returned from the afterlife having conquered it, and now regained the dragon throne, scheming to conquer still more, his terracotta army's spears, swords, scimitars, and crossbows aimed at the eyesore of Japan. And thus the country of statues would go to war with the country of dolls.

It began with a hail of ceramic arrows across Japan, amber blurs puncturing and pinning dolls upon the walls and ground. Although caught off guard, Japan was not defenseless, and when the hail ceased they boarded their leather warships and battled China's stucco fleets in the Pacific ocean, equidistant of their homelands. Using cannons, the dolls fired stockings filled with coins that tunneled near the speed of light through the hulls of Chinese ships, the blistered and ocher-stained sea rising and falling in pillars that resembled a primordial earth suffering birth spasms, and all the while statue enemies ejected marble harpoons that sodomized sterns or clawed into masts, allowing them to shimmy across the limestone wires and attack the crews and captains, slashing throats and bathing in hot cotton.

On China's mainland, the terracotta statues stood in awe and terror at the night sky, for they thought the stars were falling, but in fact they were witnessing constellations of spinning shurikens that whistled as they buried beneath beige skin and minced brick innards. In the wake of invasion, statues riding terracotta horses used granite lances to skewer multiple dolls at once, jerking and twisting the weapons so that threads snapped with excruciating pain, and the dolls swung roach-hide flails to rupture the skulls of the statues, nearly coughing in the cinnamon mist or lacerated by scattering clay shards. And so the war went on, eventually resulting in mutual extinction, followed by the populations' rebirth via still different materials, such as gold or fiberglass, followed by yet another extinction, and then a rebirth via chalk or obsidian or carbon nanotubes, a kindling and killing of populations like the cosmic dust-wheezing of a sleeping deity, the whole cycle reflecting infinity.

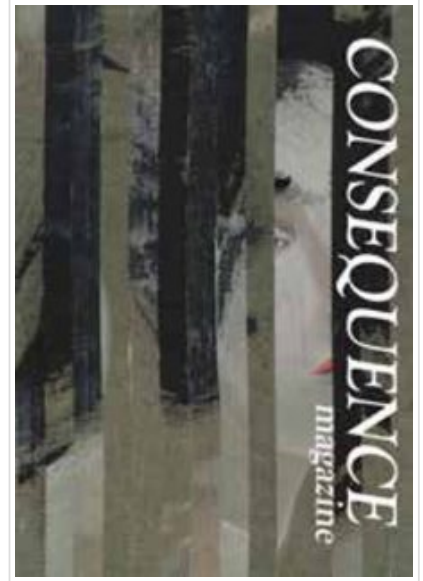


About George Salis

George Salis is the award-winning author of *Sea Above, Sun Below* (forthcoming from River Boat Books, 2019). His fiction is featured in *The Dark*, *Black Dandy*, *Zizzle Literary Magazine*, *The Sunlight Press*, *Unreal Magazine*, and elsewhere. His criticism has appeared in *Isacoustic*, *Atticus Review*, and *The Tishman Review*, and his science article on the mechanics of natural evil was featured in *Skeptic*. He is the editor of *The Collidescope* and is currently working on an encyclopedic novel titled *Morphological Echoes*. He has taught in Bulgaria, China, and Poland. Find him on Facebook, Goodreads, and at www.GeorgeSalis.com.



CURRENT ISSUE



VOLUME 11: SPRING 2019

[PURCHASE](#)

SIGNUP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to our email newsletter to stay up to date with *CONSEQUENCE*.

Enter Your E-Mail Address

[SIGNUP](#)

NEWS & EVENTS

Congratulations to Mitch Manning!

Unpacking Iraq: Bearing Witness to the War

Congratulations, Laura Laing!

[View all News & Events](#)

CONSEQUENCE magazine

CONSEQUENCE is an international literary magazine published annually, focusing on the culture and consequences of war.

We are an independent, non-profit magazine, and a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. We welcome your tax-deductible donations.

CONSEQUENCE ONLINE

[News & Events](#)

[Editor's Notes](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Non-fiction](#)

[Reviews](#)

[Videos](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

CONTACT US

Consequence Magazine

PO Box 323

Cohasset, MA 02025-0323

consequence.mag@gmail.com