

there?

Jake Adelstein: In high school I had many problems with anger and self-control. I had been studying Zen Buddhism and karate, and I thought Japan would be the perfect place to reinvent myself. It could be that my pointy right ear draws me toward neo-Vulcan pursuits--I don't know.

When I got to Japan, I managed to find lodgings in a Soto Zen Buddhist temple where I lived for three years, attending zazen meditation at least once a week. I didn't become enlightened, but I did get a better hold on myself.

Question: How did you become a journalist for the most popular Japanese-language newspaper?

Jake Adelstein: The *Yomiuri Shinbun* runs a standardized test, open to all college students. Many Japanese firms hire young grads this way. My friends thought that the idea of a white guy trying to pass a Japanese journalist's exam was so impossibly quixotic that I wanted to prove them wrong. I spent an entire year eating instant ramen and studying. I managed to find the time to do it by quitting my job as an English teacher and working as a Swedish-massage therapist for three overworked Japanese women two days a week. It turned out to be a slightly sleazy gig, but it paid the bills.

There was a point when I was ready to give up studying and the application process. Then, when I was in Kabukicho on June 22, 1992, I asked a tarot fortune-telling machine for advice on my career path, and it said that with my overpowering morbid curiosity I was destined to become a journalist, a job at which I would flourish, and that fate would be on my side. I took that as a good sign. I still have the printout.

I did well enough on the initial exam to get to the interviews, and managed to stumble my way through that process and get hired. I think I was an experimental case that turned out reasonably well.

Question: How did you succeed in uncovering the underworld in a country that is famously "closed" or restricted to foreigners? Do you think people talked more openly to you because you were American?

Jake Adelstein: I think Japan is actually more open than people give it credit for. However, to get the door open, you really need to become fluent in the spoken and written language. The written language was a nightmare for me.

You're right, though; it was mostly an advantage to be a foreigner--it made me memorable. The *yakuza* are outsiders in Japanese society, and perhaps being a fellow outsider gave us a weird kind of bond. The cops investigating the *yakuza* also tend to be oddballs. I was mentored into an early understanding and appreciation of the code of both the *yakuza* and the cops. Reciprocity and honor are essential components for both.

I also think the fact that I'm too stupid to be afraid when I should be, and annoyingly persistent as well--these things didn't help me in long-term romance, but they helped me as a crime reporter.

Question: Do you feel that investigative journalism is being threatened or aided by the expansion of the Internet and news blogs, and the closing down of many printed newspapers?

Jake Adelstein: In one sense it is being threatened because investigative journalism is rarely a solo project. It requires huge amounts of resources, capital, and time to really do one story correctly. Legal costs and FOIA documents are expensive things. The bigger the target, the greater the risk

and the more money is required. The second-biggest threat to investigative journalism is crooked lawyers and corporate shills who sue as a harassment tactic. In general, it's rather hard and time-consuming to be an army of one. It took me almost three years to break the story about *yakuza* receiving liver transplants at UCLA on my own. The costs in financial terms were immense, and so were the losses along the way. A team of reporters could have done the work much faster, probably.

However, these things said, blogging is also a great source of news that might go unreported, or be overlooked, by the mainstream media. Twitter, too, has had an interesting impact, actually helping a journalist get out of jail in the case of James Karl Buck. We're beginning to see kind of a public option in investigative journalism, too--such as things like ProPublica. They do an awesome job at investigative journalism, partly through donations, and they have a great web site. So the Internet is not all bad for investigative journalism, as long as we proceed with caution and forethought. At the same time, real intelligence-gathering work actually requires you to put down your cell phone and your computer and get off your ass and meet people in the real world. As odious as it may be, we have to sift through garbage, pound the pavement, and visit the scene of the crime. Not all answers can be found in front of a keyboard, or on Google, and the "it's all in the database" mentality is the bane of reporting and often generates shoddy reporting.

The individual journalist can do great investigative work--it's just a lot harder, and usually financially difficult to do unless you're independently wealthy, like Bruce Wayne. Most of us don't have the time or the resources or the luxury of holding down a day job and doing investigative journalism on the side, as a hobby.

Question: What do you hope your American audience can learn from your book?

Jake Adelstein: I think everyone will take away something different from the book. I suppose you can learn a lot about how journalism works in Japan, how the police work, and how the *yakuza* work. I would also hope that people take away from the book an understanding of some of the things I really like about Japan and the Japanese, things like reciprocity, honor, loyalty, and stoic suffering. I think in Japan, I learned how important it is to keep your word, to never forget your debts--and not just the financial ones--and to make repayment in due course. Perhaps that's what honor is all about.

There's a word in Japanese, *hanmen kyoshi*, which means, more or less, "the teacher who teaches by his bad example." At times, I'm an excellent *hanmen kyoshi* in the book.

Everything I've learned that's important to me is in the book somewhere. I hope there's something universal in the contents beyond just making people aware of cultural differences between the United States and Japan, or reiterating the importance and value of investigative journalism. Like a book I would choose to read to my children, I hope there's some kind of moral to it all. Maybe the real lesson is to be kind and helpful to the people you care about whenever you can, because it's good for them, and good for you, and your time with them may be much shorter than you imagined.

(Photo © Michael Lionstar)

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Starred Review. A young Japanese-schooled Jewish-American who worked as a journalist at Tokyo newspaper Yomiuri Shinbun during the 1990s, debut author Adelstein began with a routine, but never dull, police beat; before long, he was notorious worldwide for engaging the dirtiest, top-most villains of Japan's organized criminal underworld, the *yakuza*. A pragmatic but sensitive character, Adelstein's worldview takes quite a beating during his tour of duty; thanks to his immersive reporting, readers suffer with him through the choice between

personal safety and a chance to confront the evil inhabiting his city. He learns that "what matters is the purity of the information, not the person providing it," considers personal and societal theories behind Tokyo's illicit and semi-illicit pastimes like "host and hostess clubs," where citizens pay for the illusion of intimacy: "The rates are not unreasonable, but the cost in human terms are incredibly high." Adelstein also examines the investigative reporter's tendency to withdraw into cynicism ("when a reporter starts to cool down, it's very hard... ever to warm up again") but faithfully sidesteps that urge, producing a deeply thought-provoking book: equal parts cultural exposé, true crime, and hard-boiled noir. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

- Title: Tokyo Vice: An American Reporter on the Police Beat in Japan (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard)
 - Author: Jake Adelstein
 - Released: 2010-10-05
 - Language:
 - Pages: 352
 - ISBN: 0307475298
 - ISBN13: 978-0307475299
 - ASIN: 0307475298
-