

Sanity?

Jonathan Smith

Tesuke saw them waving from shore – just a few people standing there, tired and disheveled, looking as if they had just arrived after being chased from their homes.

They lived on an island where traveling by sea was illegal. Tesuke pondered this for a moment before adjusting course and sailing his catamaran towards the group. These were not Tesuke's first passengers and certainly would not be his last.

Tesuke had been on the water his whole life, and was familiar with the way first timers could be when leaving solid ground. It did not take long for the group to clamor aboard, as most moved with such haste they hardly noticed the vessel's shape or bright designs.

A few lingered, stretching out their last seconds ashore with forlorn and nostalgic stares inland, only boarding after the rest of the group was done. Tesuke gave them the time they needed, but said nothing before pushing off the beach. Mixing the sand and water into swirls with a long oar, the catamaran budged, and began moving out to sea.

Only after some time passed and the passengers saw their island's shores shrinking into the distance, did anyone try and talk with Tesuke. A representative of the group came forward and explained the misfortunes faced by him and his companions, weaving a tale of unrest, injustice and disorder caused by their island's leaders.

“It was as if we woke up one morning and all of the rules had changed,” the representative explained. “We didn't feel safe, and we didn't have a choice.” Tesuke listened while adjusting his sails and rudder for the wind.

By the time the tale was over, the waves had swallowed their home island from view. However, a new island now grew on the horizon. “At least he knows where he's going,”

said some. “Where is he taking us?” asked others. Faced with the approach of new and unknown lands, the group jostled closer to Tesuke and pressed him for answers.

The water had started to chop and waves were crashing against the hulls, creating a mist that made everyone onboard feel akin to the darkening grey clouds above.

“How do the people live on this island?” the representative asked. “Could it be a new home for us?”

Tesuke was waiting for this question. “I’ve seen this island before,” he said. “Its called *Anarchy*.” Clearly scared, the passengers whispered and worried about what might be on the island.

“There is no way around it,” said Tesuke, “but you do not have to get off the boat.” As the wind pushed the catamaran toward the island, the passengers saw what Tesuke meant by no way around – the mountainous center of the island was enormous, surrounded by miles and miles of beach, wrapping in a crescent towards the sea and reaching past the horizon. By the time the island’s shores came into view the sun was setting and small lights began to appear across the beaches and cliffs ahead.

“Many people live there,” said Tesuke, “and there is room to live freely. They don’t have rulers, but if you can rule yourself you might be happy here.”

“That’s what I want,” said the representative, “but I need to do what all my people agree is best.” Tesuke knew what would happen, but simply said, “The only way to islands beyond is across the wide beach, when the tide comes in. It will happen tomorrow morning, so you have until then to decide.”

During the night the lights ashore grew and Tesuke could see the way that some clustered together and others flickered on their own, isolated in the growing darkness. Some lights would move and meet, and some would disappear with no warning. Often noises would

echo out across the water to where the Catamaran drifted, though very few onboard were awake all night to hear them.

As the morning sun crept over the beach, the passengers awoke to Tesuke unfurling the catamaran's sails. Very quickly the water began to rise and waves rushed in from the crescent's sides. "We must sail very close to Anarchy to make it through!" warned Tesuke as he caught the wind and the catamaran jumped into motion.

Just after the rising tide collided with Anarchy's core, Tesuke and his passengers rode the second wave atop the break and raced past the impending ground. Then, they were across, watching the tide flood over the wide sands, though only to about a foot deep. "Crossing anywhere else would have beached us," said Tesuke.

The other side of the island was just as mountainous, but covered in castles that gleamed brilliantly in the morning light. Above each flew a different flag, and there were small towns covering the lower valleys, where people could be seen. "It all looks peaceful," said the representative. "Why is this place called Anarchy?"

Tesuke looked away from the island, "The people here have made war illegal," he said, "and they deal with their own problems."

"But what is out there?" asked one of the passengers, pointing to the sea. "Yes," added the representative, "what can we expect out at sea? Are there more islands out there?"

"Many," said Tesuke. "They are all different, and I do not know all their names."

Realizing their choice, the people began to talk. Anarchy bustled with activity and a small sailboat appeared, approaching Tesuke's ship gliding pleasantly across the water. "Any who wants can go with them, Anarchy is welcoming of new people."

As the small sailboat pulled up next to the catamaran, the group got quiet. A man like any other lowered a plank, and for a moment no one moved – but one, then another and

another walked across the plank and stood looking back at the catamaran, ready to leave. Over half of the group had gone and the representative was torn. "I want to stay and be totally free, but I never could live happily without knowing what happened to the rest of my people." Without asking more, the anarchist withdrew the plank, and Tesuke guided the catamaran away from the island.

As Anarchy faded, the passengers prepared for a long journey, and the representative looked out with Tesuke towards the future. "How can you live out here, on the water?"

"*This* is my island," said Tesuke. I find those like you; people whose islands are dangerous, where the rules are broken and the world does not make sense. My catamaran has simple rules, and they do not change." Confused and tired, the representative rejoined his people.

Later that day Tesuke spotted another island and guided his catamaran towards it. The island looked gentler than Anarchy, and seemed to be entirely soft hills of grass and flowers, with wooded glades in the valleys where the hillsides met. On shore were just a few people dressed in light robes and sandals, and, upon seeing the catamaran they began to wave and call for help. Tesuke was already heading towards them, and the group onboard worried about what this island would be like.

"Thank you!" the newcomers said as soon as they had settled onboard. "We cannot stay here any longer, it is driving us insane."

Curious, the representative asked "We too left our island; what happened here that made you leave?"

"Oh," a newcomer said, "Nothing happened. Nothing ever happened. The rules here never change, and the island forbids progress. We are all safe and have all the natural pleasures of the world, but we have no real choices."

To the representative's surprise, over half of his people began to talk about staying. "But why?" cried the representative. "We left our home because we didn't have a choice!" "No," said his people. "We left because we didn't feel safe. Now we choose to feel safe." Half of them decided to get off the boat.

Tesuke was familiar with what was happening, but the representative was lost. As Tesuke pushed off the sandy beach with his long oar and let the wind take the catamaran away, one of the people wandering ashore turned and called out, "What's this island named?" to which a newcomer yelled back, "It's known as *The Land of the Lotus Eaters!*"

For a while no one spoke, but eventually one of the newcomers stood and asked Tesuke, "Where are you taking us?" Nearby, the representative sat, listening. "To Anarchy," said Tesuke, "It's the only way to get to the many islands beyond."