

memo

Monday, November 10, 2003

To: Just one more cigarette

From: More coffee

Re: An (unedited) excerpt from my novel in progress *Zen Arcade*, chapter 4, "Chartered Trips"

Just as before, he spent most of his time in his room reading. He had gone back to not talking at all. There still wasn't much he really wanted to say.

Something has to change, he thought. But what? He liked the quiet, he guessed. He liked not talking. He liked sitting and reading. He realized that he'd backed himself into some kind of narrative corner, a place where nothing could happen. He could spend the rest of his life in this room, reading and thinking, leaving only to eat, go to the bathroom, go to the library for more books. He half expected a knock on the door. And suddenly, he thought, there was a knocking at the door. He chuckled to himself, and thought perhaps he'd read too many books. The door or the phone. The phone could ring. He would pick it up, and there'd be a mysterious voice on the other end—a woman. She'd give him just enough information to make him curious. He'd spend a couple of weeks researching what she'd said, and then he'd leave the house on some sort of wild goose chase quest, the kind that has no resolution, not even after he'd tracked the woman down, gotten her whole story, fallen in love with her . . . made mad passionate love to her . . . and then what? They would get married, raise a child. They'd forget all about his quest—the very quest with which he had been burning the first time they'd made love. He'd remember it one day when he was fifty, and he'd think about how their lives had played out since then. He'd be sitting in his comfortable den, a book in his lap . . .

Or he would make mad, passionate love to her, and the next day she would disappear, never to be heard from again. His quest would shift focus. He'd spend the rest of his life looking for her, and one day, when he was fifty, sitting in a filthy, single-occupancy room, in the heart of skid row, in some anonymous city, he would come to the sentimental conclusion that he had been at the end of his quest once, that his quest had ended the night he had held her in his arms, and she had whispered *I love you* into his ear. And he would break down in that filthy, little room, and cry like a motherfucking baby at the thought that if he had just cherished the memory of that night, and lived his life like a normal person, instead of making himself a poor and broken man looking for something, something that had existed in his memory this whole time, he would have lived a happy, an infinitely happy and fulfilling life. . . .

Or . . . he closed the book—he wasn't reading it anyway—and swiveled around in his chair. He got up and walked into the kitchen. He looked at the calendar. Tomorrow was his twenty-third birthday. He'd lived two lifetimes in the last fifteen minutes, and nearly forgotten his birthday.

What the hell, he thought, when nothing happens, what the hell does a birthday matter? He opened the refrigerator and bent over to look into it. A knocking, or a ringing, or, he thought, when he stood up from rummaging through the refrigerator, he could bump his head and forget everything, and then spend the rest of his life trying to figure out what he was doing in that house, wearing those clothes. Whose things were these? What the hell are these stupid toys and this childish picture? And these tapes? He smiled though, when he thought about reading all of his books again for the first time.