

KUJIRA

*Egum Atoll to Guam, December 2002 –
May 2003*

Michel Lippitsch

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This is a work of memoir. It reflects the author's recollections of events, locales, and conversations from his own experience over time. Some names and identifying details may have been changed.

First edition.

A Note on the Text

This book gathers four journals covering the five months between December 2002 and May 2003, aboard the *Heraclitus*: a Christmas entry from Egum Atoll in Papua New Guinea that runs on into a five-week stay at Kitava, spent largely with two pods of dolphins; a longer piece from Kavieng, New Ireland, written around the ship's departure on the long haul north; a substantial Chuuk Lagoon and Namunuito Atoll journal covering most of February and March; and a Guam journal picking up in April, through the typhoon named Kujira and the days before the ship finally sailed for the North Pacific.

Together they cover the missing five months — the ship working her way up through Melanesia and Micronesia before turning north into open ocean. The title borrows the typhoon's name; Kujira is also simply the Japanese word for whale, and whales — sperm whales especially — surface throughout the book at nearly every turning point, arriving and departing like a kind of punctuation.

Contents

26 December 2002 — Egum Atoll

Kitava

The Dolphins of Kitava

Kavieng

10 February 2003 — The First Surf

14 February 2003 — Pacific

15 February 2003 — Theater

16 February 2003 — Solaris

Chuuk

The Wrecks

18 March 2003 — Leaving Chuuk

Namunuito Atoll

The Passage to Guam

4 April 2003 — Guam

Kujira

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26 December 2002

Egum Atoll

The sailing canoes come out to trade, one last chance to swap vegetables for sugar or rice before we leave. Paradise, for a while now, has proved almost too much for us.

With Laser I go for a last dive at the entrance, a magic dive that brings issues to the surface along with it. The current runs hard into the lagoon, the deep blue of dreams. Hundreds of gray reef sharks circle below us, and above them the babies — it must be breeding season, and I'm overwhelmed by the number of them. I sense no fear, almost a welcome; a few come close, curious, making their passes. In the middle of it all, a few bumphead parrotfish move through without threat.

Yesterday was the dive of dives. On a pinnacle close to the surface, the silhouettes of baby gray reef sharks extend over the silver blue. Below, fifty more, some of huge size, circling — the biggest ones solitary, coming up from the deep. Holding my breath, motionless, I let them pass close. Huge schools of yellowfin tuna pass by too, closer to the entrance than I'd expect to find them. Giant dogtooth tuna cruise past showing their teeth. Jacks, trevally, rainbow runners in the hundreds, moving in silver squadrons. We haven't moved for fifteen minutes.

The rock — a limestone formation rising out of the deep blue, carved underwater, sloping down into the dark. The birds are breeding on the island, terns, herons, white eagles, all flying overhead to look at the strangers. The coral here is healthy, but the area has been fished; if they knew about the cut, and the hundreds of sharks. Maybe the sharks got smarter, and moved away from the rock.

Further out, off the reef, almost beyond the edge of visibility, a school of giant trevally hangs in a tight pack, and a school of giant barracuda appears among hundreds of rainbow runners, holding such a tight formation that I find myself surrounded at less than an arm's length. A beautiful dive.

We haven't moved for fifteen minutes, none of us wanting to come up, entranced by the beauty of it. Magic is alive, and we are living it.

Kitava

We scout the anchorage at Kitava on the last day of the year. The dolphins come first — spinners, then bottlenose — the whole pod turning together to read us with sound, sending one in closer to inspect us before the rest hold back at the edge of the sand for a quarter of an hour. We find our spot, and the Heraclitus lowers her sails.

The ship herself becomes a decoration for New Year's — strings of light, palm fronds, the scent of frangipani drifting through all of it. We dance, and for one night find that real togetherness a dance floor seems able to produce all on its own. By ten the rum is doing its own dancing too, Eddie especially, in scenes that make a few of us uncomfortable. A jam session carries us toward midnight; the champagne comes out to "Age of Aquarius," playing from Hair. Earlier, an extraordinary meteor shower had lit the sky — aliens, someone insists; the rest of us settle for the beauty of it.

We walk into the village the next morning to true Melanesian hospitality — a feast prepared for the new year, the people still singing in church, a coconut brought for us to drink and a spread of food laid out before we've even sat down. The biggest bunch of bananas I have ever seen hangs beside the bell.

An old man dies in the village a few days into our stay, and every activity in Kitava stops at once. The mourning gathers at his house — a crying that is really a kind of singing, sad and powerful together, and I find myself slowing down just to listen to it. It will go on for twenty-four hours at least, the sound itself carrying the news to every corner of the island faster than anyone could walk it; no radio, no television, until a feast finally releases the village from its grief. By the time we reach the beach ourselves, everyone already knows.

The Dolphins of Kitava

The encounters that started the day we arrived don't stop — if anything they deepen, almost daily for the month we stay. Two pods work these waters: one of perhaps thirty bottlenose, all adults, tight and cautious; a second, mixed with spinners, that will ride our bow when the current runs right. We learn to tell individuals apart before long, and we rub the side of our rubber dinghy to make a high, singing note, trying to give ourselves a signature they might recognize — three times now they've turned and come toward the sound of it.

The first meetings last fifteen minutes; by the second week we're following them for an hour at a stretch, forgetting to check how long I've been under. On the eighth of January the wind pushes swells over the reef and we find them surfing in on the break toward shore — and for the first time the bottlenose ride the bow of the rubber boat instead of shying from it. Two in particular keep circling back to inspect Orla and me, unhurried, in no rush to seek the deeper water they usually retreat to. We follow for the better part of an hour, the longest we've stayed with them yet, diving down and resting on the sand until I half forget my own breath.

Often they play among themselves in ways that read as courtship as much as anything else — touching, chasing, rubbing against each other on a favorite patch of sponge,

rolling together in pairs. More than once I watch two or three of them mate in the open water, entirely unhurried and unembarrassed about it, and it occurs to me that we're the ones who'd feel strange, not them. Mothers keep their babies close, beeping at us as we pass; the elders lead or close the gap around the younger ones. By now individuals are becoming familiar sights, and every session leaves me scanned, seen through, sometimes emotionally recharged and sometimes simply emptied out. Being a dolphin, for an hour, starts to feel like the more natural state.

Andrew is the closest thing Kitava has to a monarch, though he isn't the chief — his son holds that title — and everyone still treats him as the island's big man. He was adopted, of all things, by a German crocodile hunter years ago and traveled with him after, in and out of small businesses on half the islands in the province, before coming home to Kitava for good. His compound is banana trees, papaya, carved canoes, and an open thatched house where I sit chewing betel nut with him most afternoons until my teeth are red like his. One morning he and his brother take Eddie and me out trolling for wahoo — the fish bite one after another, we lose four for every one we land, and I chant on the bow, old songs from Mbabanga, calling the sea to help us. We come back with eight good meals for the freezer and a bond with Andrew that outlasts the fishing.

On the beach it is canoe season — a communal affair, the whole village camping

out with food and blankets to carve a new hull, and it feels less like labor than a holiday. Each strike of the machete rings its own note, the log resonating as it hollows, the waves keeping time on the shore beneath it. A canoe here is not simply built; it is given a life of its own, married to the sea through a succession of chants and small rituals, and only then trusted with a crossing. We watch one launch at dawn: the owner stands at the stern and calls the wind in — *ke ke ke ke ke ke ke ke* — and the sail rises as if summoned, the Heraclitus shrinking behind it as it clears the reef. Eibes says afterward what I'd been thinking without saying it: that we could have gone on with them, right then, and never looked back.

I've spent most of this voyage looking at the world from a kind of bird's-eye view — forms, movements, the shape of things from a distance. Kitava teaches me something else: that it's always the individual who changes you, whether it's a dolphin who has learned your outline, or a man like Andrew, or a canoe with its own name and its own soul. I don't know yet where any of this is going. All I can do is steer myself in a direction and trust that the others chasing the same dream will find their way alongside.

Kavieng

Huge fishing vessels — purse-seine tuna boats out of Korea, the Philippines, China, the U.S. — all anchored in the harbor. As the *Heraclitus* passes next to them I can't help but cry. This time the crying is sadness. The scale of it is clear now, and since we've never seen them here before, it comes as a real shock. I remember myself in countless speeches, talking about the coming of foreign fishing fleets to this part of the world. Here they are.

I'll learn more later about the tuna industry, but for now I'm simply sad for the ocean. Kavieng, this time, will teach us about fishing.

I meet Simon, who works a longliner out of New Zealand and is starting a business of his own, and Hue, a Kiwi with the fisheries department on a mission to convince us that purse-seine tuna is a sustainable industry, bringing reports and papers on the state of the Pacific fishery.

Echuca Patch — the dive site that never quite is, only ever a dive site. Through words collected on the island we know, intellectually, that Echuca was a burial ground for the ancestors of Nusa Lik, and ever since those words were said the experience of diving it has changed. For some the meaning stays purely intellectual; for others it creates sensation. My own history with the place goes back a few years — some of the most amazing

dives I've had, always dramatic, even before I knew what it meant to the people here: dolphins, sailfish, chants, visions, a thousand-barracuda extravaganza, dead dolphins, everything at once, Orla's poetic writing, space, all of it materializing at Echuca. We dive it only once this time, low visibility but full of fish. Emotional.

10 February 2003

The First Surf

We depart. Our first step in a journey of thousands of miles — the circumnavigation of the Pacific Ocean.

I surf, really surf, for the first time, with Sean and Irn.

*Floating on huge Pacific swells,
sunset sky a light show, glowing
mythical stories
to a mind allying with peace,
birds and sea crystal clear, sharp,
detailed,
the smell of ocean brews,
waiting for the right moment, the
right wave,
where you, at the right place, in
mind, body, and space-time,
take the wave.*

*Time will expand, arrest itself,
bend, curve, play with and around
you,
and you ride some of the mightiest
power of all —
wind, water, gravity, moon, stars,
planets, universes,
synergizing in a wave,
coming to clash with the land.
The foam all around,*

*ride the wave, ride the wave,
break on through to the other side,
being on all sides, being all sides,
the water reaches the shallows,
only a few toes deep,
sharp coral reefs that could shred
you to pieces.*

*Without the threat of falling, there
is no dancing on the waves.*

I started a new love affair with the ocean, discovered a new way to interact with her. Surfing has simply added a new behavior pattern to a relationship with the planet ocean that already existed. Now I can take my cosmic imagination on a surfing trip around the galaxies — a new transport system, all body-operated, for experimental senses. To sum it up: I had a blast, a revelation of another way of being, and I've embraced it, adding it to my own individual cocktail of existence.

The waves speak a new language with me now. I know it will matter for the voyage ahead — but not to forget that we are voyaging right now. The Pacific shows herself in a different mood tonight: the wind against us, the sail down, rolling on uneven swells. We're heading for Chuuk Lagoon, a giant atoll in the heart of Micronesia, the last land before the wide open of Pacifico. Pacific, peace. Pacific, peace. Pacific, peace. Mantra for the

day — peace on the inner, to let us ride
Pacífico on the outer.

Truk — fierce Second World War battle,
hundreds of Japanese ships sunk, resting now
on the bottom of the lagoon, the largest
artificial reef system in the world, weapons
and killing machines becoming cathedrals,
places of worship to the beauty and power of
life on the ocean. Coming to worship ocean life
— another good mantra.

Wind still out of the northeast, we're riding
north, the engine on just long enough to cross
the equator, and it comes with the little
traditional rite of passage: salt-water shaving
foam, permanent-marker signatures across
backs, eggs cracked on heads and dusted with
custard powder, a dash of fish sauce for good
measure. All for the memory of it, making a
deal out of a line on the chart.

Tonight we're reading Krishnamurti to
close out our Thursday-night session. He's
been revealing in all of us, at times almost
provoking violent reactions and near wars — a
total paradox, an advocate of nonviolence
stirring up so much of it. A reality check, that
as a group, as an ensemble, we don't really
listen. Synchronicity, that I just wrote about
my own experience surfing, in a way
summarizing what he teaches.

Start living.

Waves, skies, reflections — don't dissect
them, take them whole. The dissection is

already included in the whole. Dissecting is a game worth playing, but it shouldn't be the food we eat.

The swells grow more chaotic, forces acting on the surface of "Pacific" from many directions, some distant. Linda picks up on the cosmic forces at work but wants to scientize them, explain tides and currents; she can't quite, but she conveys the nonlinear, all-simultaneous forces at play well enough. The surface of the ocean tells its own story tonight: trade winds from the northeast, swells more easterly, high cirrus clouds leaving a clear sky reflecting "Pacific." I've started personifying Pacific, our first character, a part of planet ocean. We call it planet ocean for the look of her, the blue of her — I've been trapped a long time in this poetic view, and I still am. The reality is that the ocean, on a planetary scale, represents only a thin layer of the mass of the planet; seen from the surface, a balloon's skin, then yes, it is planet ocean. All of this is linear thinking — layers, scale, quantification, value.

"Pacific," my new mind-and-body friend, teacher. A pure literary creation taking shape. Today, moody, chaotic, reflections turned back on myself, becoming Pacific — a relationship begun. Real, unreal, for whom? Poetry, Pacific, ocean Pacific, taken by the word, dancing, whirling with Pacific. Do I want you male or female? Pacifico, maybe Pacifica, maybe all of it in one, Pacific. I know you're strong, like a god, and maybe you are one — presiding over the affairs of my mind, not a Greek one, but a

planetary, mythical entity created for my own game of perception. My own megalomaniac, dramatic universe. Hey, Pacific — riding you without trying to tame you, or the flow of my own mind, just riding, words flowing, wind blowing, ocean spirit, waves talking to the body, all and everyone as one, and the gods are laughing, but only because I'm making them laugh. Hey, Pacific, you need some friends — maybe introduce me. I long to meet the cetacean spirit. I've flirted with it forever, keep running into her, teasing me, but always there when I need her. I know the two of you, Pacific and Cetaceana, have known each other since forever.

14 February 2003

Pacific

Choices of thought, always — the choice to ride with what's given, the surroundings, the choice to pick a focus. Information coming in from the group: Valentine's, three years in a row now, has made it to the ship, this time with heart-shaped cookies. Choices to watch — Eibes frantic, erratic gestures, a compulsive drive to write lists, faces emotionally charged, vibrations, each with their own individualities, bodies moving with or against the ship's own movement, always a ride of perception, choosing to get totally absorbed by words, a computer screen, letters on a keypad, intentions. The integrity of a mind.

Our own microcosm here on board, values at stake on a daily basis, able to play with the biggest challenges of history — the future, or a possible future, of humanity. Grand delusional thoughts, or a true laboratory of explorations. Today I believe in the integrity of my "heart," a feeling that starts in the cells, standing up for the individual's right to freedom.

The space in our bodies, freedom in body and mind, buffeted by the biosphere — skies, seas, energies, all mingling in a search for the truth of the moment. Is there only truth in the moment? Collectors of impressions, different tastes, always exploring, driven always to seek the new, ride into the unknown — for the thrill of it, but also to stand as an explorer, refusing to give up one of man's sacred capacities: to

become. Becoming, being, becoming, being.
Energy refining itself, creative. Not art for
art's sake, but the art of man.

I ride with the dream of sea people — the
people of the sea, my own translation for a
universal man, integrating the past, present,
and future of what humanity might be. A mad
thing to think I can. Yes, I am. Yes, I can,
simply by saying so.

15 February 2003

Theater

Theater — a name that means. The possibilities to do, to be. One can be a character: I am the president of the United States, I am a shamanic dancer, I am a knight of the round table, I am, I am — so many possible I's. One can also be what has never been before, new forms for new characters, exploration all over again. Transcending time, where a caveman might interact with a computer programmer. Dialogues with history. Visualization from cosmic celestial movement, or Paris in the 1800s, or the trees of Sherwood Forest in Robin Hood's time. Visualization of textures, smells, tones. An actor enters the stage, and becomes.

An actor learns to use his tools, and his tools are himself — everything inside him, transformed, played, to become an act. An act is an action carried through so anyone can see it. Actors act, and an act needs an actor. Relationship, always. The creation of relationship with all and everything, ending in a manifestation, of an act, inner or outer.

So here I am, pushing at forms, inventing the formless in order to be able to be all forms. A step back, to see that one can choose any form at all.

16 February 2003

Solaris

Solaris, the right film for my endless wandering right now.

One thought: to pirate our own ship. Stop the engine, float or sail with the current, let the route unfold with the elements, and see how long we'd last. Drop the hostages at the next stop. Get some ground on some island and start a herb garden. Troll a fishing-attraction device, rig a rain-collecting system, turn off every useless piece of equipment and every pump. Proclaim the Heraclitus her own universal status, go illegally into ports to refuel or trade fish for vegetables and get back out to sea. Drop anchor on a reef, refill the freezers, dry some fish, keep going. And when the money runs out, write the story of this crazy new country of ours — the nation of sea people, allied with the cetacean nation, representing the voice of the ocean, at least as an ideal. Refused by everyone, of course, fugitives — could we legally live this way? Maybe even sponsored by a few freaks around the planet who'd find the idea cool. Everything documented, and finally we'd get caught, raising issues in the world. Could be a movie, at least. Fishing sequences, exotic locations, political issues, human rights, dreams and harsh realities, seas and reefs, a smuggling scene, psychological drama — all in one. Now the same gang hijacks a space shuttle and

pirates it to Mars, demanding material to start building a colony.

The weather is picking up, the swells swelling, the wind steadily increasing, reaching twenty-five knots — still "nice" weather, except that everything else is working against us. We're beating on the waves. The motion is wearing everyone down, and the engine doesn't give the ear a rest. I put the walkman on, Pat Metheny's new album, thanks to Laser. There are musicians who completely fulfill your musical sense, and Metheny does that for me — he plays the music I always wanted to hear, and my ear evolves along with his own musical evolution. I always said I'm a frustrated musician.

On the helm I sing. I love the helm — steering the ship on the wide open ocean, a romantic image, but it's also a place where you play with the ship and the sea together, playing with each swell. Cerulean strikes show now under the foam of the wave crests; the bow crashes here and there into an incoming wave and for a moment everything shakes. The waves are messy, and there isn't a truly dry spot left on deck.

We've left Melanesia now, raising anchor at Kavieng, but Melanesia hasn't left us. I know I carry part of her spirit within me now. Like Pacifico, Melanesia has become a friend, a true friend that isn't afraid to teach. Somehow she knew our dreams included her, and more, that we needed her. I hope she'll be strong

enough to guard her kingdom against the invasion of the big dragons, full metal jacket, that keep knocking at her door. We'll come back within three years, and witness how far the dragon army has advanced, gagging the resources they haven't plundered yet.

The ocean is so alive, and it has given me the power to go on. The constant spectacle of destruction and blind stupidity in Indonesian and Philippine waters left a doomed spirit in me, took every sparkle of hope for the world's coral reefs. The gift of our stay in Melanesia — undeniably some of the best coral reef diving left in the world — boosted our batteries once again. It was evident too, in the faces, the words, the vibrations of the people who came aboard, that we were living an exclusive, rare moment of natural ecstasy. We hope they carried some of that hope back with them, fighting the world virus of everything is doomed, why bother, there's no hope, we're all fucked, the planet is gone — and brought back to the cities some of the light that shone so bright for us in Melanesia.

Chuuk

From the top of the mast I can see clearly the entrance to the lagoon. A bird's-eye view, the birds themselves flying around to keep me company. Two bottlenose dolphins guide us through the reefs. "Drop the anchor!" "Dropping the anchor." The chain runs through the winch. "Let three hundred feet out." We're secure; the anchor is holding.

Culture shock, impacted by techno. Carol, back on board, talks with Chell about peanut butter and everything she saw in the store, the shows she watched on TV in her room — she spent the night in a hotel, needing time alone, away from a difficult relationship. The trip has been hard on our systems, hard on the body, two weeks pounding into the wind, and it's worn on relationships too.

The first night calls for celebration — the first night on land always does. Many beers, getting drunk, that synchronicity where everyone you need to meet is here right now. Mason, jovial, welcomes us to "his" island — he traveled here from Hawaii with Mau, the famed Micronesian navigator, using stars, waves, and birds, no compass, no charts, two thousand miles on a traditional outrigger sailing canoe.

Peace Corps volunteers, FEMA staff, all helping the island recover from the typhoon that hit it less than a year ago. We got a donation of a truckload of aid supplies in

Miami, going out of date — and, surprising enough, I find some of the same products for sale in the run-down shops here. FEMA vouchers accepted, the sign in half the windows. The U.S. is pumping in relief funds, but no one here seems to be rebuilding anything; the place feels like it's collapsing, no one taking care of the houses or their surroundings, trashing their own place. There isn't, I think, a strong sense of ownership here, and the technology arrives used like a toy. Eddie is handed the keys to a car to drive; beers are put constantly into our hands. Where does all this money come from?

We walk with Eibes and Ferdi to the top of the hill, an old army camp below, a strategic lookout during the war and probably long before that. We sit on a tree, overlooking the whole of Chuuk Lagoon — peaceful, a total download. Terns with long tails fly by; a flashback to Bermuda, where I used to see them often, and Bermuda brings its own memories of wrecks. From up here, the work of industrial civilization lies all exposed below, a clash of cultures a hundred years old. The wind plays with the grass, undulating like waves; the surface of the lagoon ripples with long streaks. The little humans play down there with their toys — there's nowhere really to go, but there's so many cars that traffic jams happen anyway, on a small island thousands of miles from any industrial center.

The place is littered with beer cans, most of the population as drunk as can be. Cars run up

and down the few kilometers of paved road, nowhere else to go. On board, a lot of supermarket talk — Snickers bars, brands of peanut butter, Dorito chips, chocolate bars. Simply observing: how few of us actually went to Melanesia with our whole heart. We're children of this civilization too, and unfortunately it's the worst of it that's taken hold here — no sense of aesthetics, every house run down, trash everywhere. Eddie comes back drunk, having spent two days in town — he had to get drunk, he wouldn't have been accepted otherwise. Stories of firecrackers dropped in fuel tanks, and guns, and plenty of alcohol. This is hospitality too, offering a high as a welcome. Let's have some fun. Welcome to Chuuk.

The Wrecks

Lunch with Mason, Eibes, and a German filmmaker — navigation, anecdotes, birds, but also planes, listening for the sound of one and watching for its direction. In the evening, Mason, an American named Sean, and Simion from the visitors' bureau tell tales of history, the war especially, a whole theory on how the Americans knew where to bomb, involving spies. To dive the wrecks costs thirty dollars a permit; the whole place lives off American money, seventy percent of the economy, though the U.S. is pulling out, and Mason reckons life here will revert to something more traditional once it does.

A huge cargo ship comes in from Seattle, three weeks out — it gives a sense of perspective on our own tempo, three months at sea on our own, non-stop, before civilization hits us again. I read the news online, the coming war in Iraq, hardly in doubt now despite the talk and the controversy, France leading the opposition. September eleventh marked a shift in the world's history; the game keeps playing out.

The ship is pushed against the dock one night — the worst place to be. In something like a memory transfer, the whole drama of a sinking ship downloads itself into me. Telepathy, or brain hacking? Eddie is at the right place, on the line, holding the fattest fender at the point of impact, even after getting smashed the night before on beer with

Simion. We are brothers; he knows it and I know it. I run to a Korean fishing boat to find bigger fenders in case the wind picks up, find styrofoam buoys fat enough to protect us, and run back with more confidence. The rain pours down. We come through almost undamaged, and wealthier for the test.

We dive a Japanese bomber, shot down as it took off, resting almost undamaged in forty feet of water — a play with history, a play with weightlessness, though inwardly I know why I'm underwater, and a wreck is just a wreck to me unless the marine growth on it has turned it into a sculpture. Another day, another wreck, but my eyes keep drifting to the reef, sitting sadly on the old anchorage of the Japanese fleet — how many anchors dropped here, how many oil-filled bilges pumped out, how much has leaked from the dozen wrecks lying below us.

I start a rescue course with Linda, Stan, and Ferdi, using our own lives and personalities on board to illustrate the outline. Acting class in the afternoon, a sloth sequence and a projection exercise that Eibes clearly aims at a confrontation between Orla and Carol — nobody's fooled, and it half works, half doesn't; clinical observation, energy stirred up without being transformed into art.

A dive finally hits the right wreck — incredible overgrowth, sixty years of life colonizing the whole structure, oysters, soft coral, sponge, hard coral, four eagle rays

gliding along the edge, easy penetration, old bottles and plates and phones littering the deck, a death machine turned into a work of natural art. Our best dive so far, a school of mackerel feeding, mouths wide open, on the plankton-saturated water.

We enter another wreck through the torpedo hole that sank her, right at the bow. Encrusted with life, she stands now as a monument between life and death — the death of Japanese soldiers by the thousands, floating in the lagoon, washing up on the beaches, smoke and oil covering the surface for miles. Truk had a town of thirty thousand Japanese once, Little Tokyo, on Dublon Island, a tuna cannery, a drydock, the main fortress of the whole region through the war. It's this dive I'll remember most, though — a shark dive, gray reef sharks close enough to send a tingle of unease through us, Mason diving with a stick in hand, the water clear, the reef recovering after years of dynamite fishing.

A whole week of it — dive, dive, dive. Mason's wife Sincera and their one-year-old, Maikai, visit on the weekend; the baby tumbles down the salon hatch at one point and comes up without a scratch. Drama seems to want a place on our little ship this week regardless. Quite a few people lose the plot, Kira especially, hysterical, trying to throw someone off the ship, escorted up the mountain by a local policeman to shake off her mood. Orla is the wise one afterward, sitting with her, talking her back down. Real,

unspoken issues float on board; Eibes truly unable to relax.

I strap on a double tank and an extra bottle for a deep dive on the San Francisco Maru with Milo, the Canadian dive master. We descend to her deck — two perfectly preserved tanks and a big bow gun standing as a monument to destruction — and into the cargo hold, stacks of mines and rockets. I get narced; every movement becomes deliberate. We rise slowly to thirty feet for our first decompression stop, the trucks in the hold a hundred and fifty feet below us now. Forty minutes of decompression at fifteen feet becomes a meditation, my breath slow and regular.

Mason organizes a talk at the senior high school on the hill — once a Jesuit school, then the Japanese communication headquarters for the whole Pacific during the war; there's still a hole in the ceiling from the American bomb that ended it. Students from Yap, Palau, Chuuk, the Marianas, the Carolines, the Marshalls, sit on the floor, girls grooming each other's hair, full attention nonetheless, while I try to explain what "sea people" means, not as a catchphrase but as a way of thinking. We map Micronesia on the blackboard, a network of information, each island reporting back what it knows of its own reef and land.

Sunday-night speeches, everyone talking about the war. Five million people died in the genocide in Rwanda without a word said, and

now a handful of names — Bush, Blair,
Saddam, bin Laden — and media frenzy,
headline news. France takes the role of
opposition and gets smeared in the American
papers; people emptying bottles of French
wine into the gutter, an ultimate stupidity, and
we all fall for it too, out here on board.

18 March 2003

Leaving Chuuk

Leaving Chuuk, leaving more than that behind, I hope. America is at war as we speak, word from the FEMA guys. Great lab this morning, full attention on the smallest, most imperceptible movement, mapping the brain, looking for origins, impulses, where it all starts. My breath is clean, steady, strong.

Tuna and birds feed together, a mad, frenzied dance, boiling foam on the surface, still inside the lagoon, heading for the northern entrance. The islands on the outer edge remind us that what we experienced in Chuuk isn't all of what Chuuk is. The wind holds steady from the northeast, perfect for the sails. We exit through a wide passage, greeted by Pacific swells, the blue suddenly intense.

As we raise sail, a huge pod of spinner dolphins comes to visit. We're barely moving, less than a knot, and against all expectation they stay with us, close enough that I feel invited in. I go in — holding tight to the bolster chain, lifted clean out of the water by the swells. A parade begins. Surrounded on every side, talking, busy talk. One dolphin with three spots on his back keeps coming closer and closer; I recognize him by his eyes. By then I've lost my shorts, naked in the ocean, my breath steady, staying longer as the moment stretches on. He inspects me from every side, passes so close he nearly touches me.

Suddenly more and more of them arrive, tight groups, pairs, groups of four, all around, a few diving below to whirl in a dance of their own. The one keeps making his passes, straight on, from behind.

I can't recall how long I'm in the water; everything else disappears. I believe I'm recharged. I pass through different states of mind, and at the end I am one, and the "one" rides beside me as if I were part of them — I know I am. This certainty, in the water, in that moment, is real. The mood is peaceful, I am peaceful, despite the swells picking me up and setting me down. I come out with a current burn on my skin, an irritation I barely notice. The dolphins keep riding slow circles around us — "the one" looking back, wondering if I'll get back in. He cruises the bow up and down; I lean out, hand outstretched, almost touching the water, my full attention on him. He responds with movement I've never seen a dolphin make, joined now by two partners, their fins touching. Off to the side, a giant spins clear out of the water like a torpedo. The sun sets, and as the light fades they all disappear except for him, a last few runs before he too is gone. I am totally high, my speech gone soft, and I lie down in Nemo's.

My face radiates; Stinj notices it. I really needed this, in retrospect — fuel to keep going, a good teaching from my friends in the sea.

Namunuito Atoll

An atoll away from it all, though connected to it all. The western side of Ulul Island lies sheltered, the sea almost a mirror, while a force five rages out on the open ocean beyond. We got our anchorage chart from the captain of the Microdawn, a supply boat that cruises the maze of Micronesian islands — the word well chosen, micro islands dotting the sea.

Leo takes us to see the chief's house, escorted by village kids carrying gifts of tea, sugar, coffee, rice. The chief is half Chinese; his brother became the first president of the Federated States of Micronesia at independence, fifteen years ago. Old, his face wrinkled, his skin light from staying out of the sun, he sits with an illuminating smile, listening to every word. We're here to experience, to get a taste of the essence of a Micronesian island — we're in. A typhoon hit the island five months ago, the same one that hit Guam; the crops are gone, and FEMA has given rice and cooking oil, one bag for three people for four months, not enough to live on but, as they say, better than nothing.

On a sloping drop-off we're visited by two huge silvertip sharks, curious, coming real close, parading their beauty in front of us — the most gracious shark of them all, to my mind. Then a huge dogtooth tuna, over two meters, five hundred pounds, cruises by, making the sharks look like midgets. I stare in awe, barely breathing.

Leo and Philip pick me up in the morning for a fishing trip — fishing is the essence of Micronesia here, and they're proud navigators, fishing their survival. We spot the birds, the sea boiling with skipjack in a feeding frenzy; Philip keeps changing lures to find the color and size that will bite. We land three fish from the school, the prize a baby yellowfin.

"Breakfast time" — they cut open a tuna, dip it in salt water, eat it raw, open a parcel of fermented taro paste, hard to swallow at first, the taste growing familiar. "It tastes better after a few days," Leo says — not unlike my own culture with cheese, seeking out different tastes from a limited harvest.

The line pulls tight again, a tuna on — then a second pull, nearly ripping the line from my hand. A shark. We haul it in, inch by inch, a two-to-three-meter bull shark on the end of the line. I hand my line over and stay out of the way, nervous at the thought of bringing this into the boat. There's nowhere to hide, and falling in isn't an option. Philip beats at its head with the paddle; the shark fights, takes the line, and eventually snaps it. My finger is cut. The excitement is over.

We get back to the ship with fifteen fish, better than nothing, they say, though not what they'd hoped for. I thank them for the teaching — I've learned and experienced more than I asked for. My own gestures were watched as carefully as I watched theirs; we come out of it closer to each other, the sea our common

medium. Tonight the village dances, in costume. See you tonight.

A small trick, learned in passing: the penny test for ciguatera poisoning in barracuda — if the penny turns green, throw the fish away, a copper reaction, invaluable for survival at sea.

The Passage to Guam

Thursday, 27 March 2003. On the sea, a force five, sails out, wind on the beam, five knots, rainbow runners all around us. We left Namunuito with the biggest school of rainbow runners I've ever seen; four days later they're still with us, and we feast on them.

The baggywrinkle collapses, exposing bare wire, chafing through the snotter; we lower sail, and for the first time in ages I feel seasick, hanging from the shrouds by one rope through the harness, bashed around as I untwist it. Two one-hour sessions, wanting to vomit, telling my mind to fight it. The sea is rough, but that incredible blue of big swells, the rainbow runners like torpedoes following the ship.

I try out different recipes with the catch — rainbow runner sliced thin and marinated in vinegar, chili, a pinch of sugar, salt, black pepper, sliced onion, three hours in the fridge; sashimi and sushi from the yellowfin, the best of all of them; mahi mahi, too tough from struggling, better cured with salt, sugar, pepper, and dill, wrapped in cloth for a couple of days. Three recipes, none requiring heat, enough to keep me satisfied for five days straight without craving anything else.

The task in Guam looks crazy, the list keeps growing, but we're determined to leave on the fifth of May, as Gaie and Laser have suggested

— five weeks is enough, with two more in hand to arrive "on time" in Seattle.

War is on; the BBC has stopped broadcasting anything else, twenty-four hours of Iraq. We're escorted by thousands of rainbow runners, our own protective army, torpedo-shaped, shining in the depths at night, three hundred sixty degrees of coverage around the ship. They let themselves be caught, but sparingly — twenty of them, a kilo and a half on average, two of them enough to feed us. The universe provides, but only what we need, not more, not less. Kira, who caught the most and the most eagerly, has decided to stop. We watch them as we wake and as we go to sleep; they've made it into our dinner conversation, our contemplative moods.

We prepare our Chinese firecrackers, a gift from Clem, our friend in Kavieng, for the Chinese New Year — meant to chase away bad spirits, and before lighting them we push that intention in. Eddie holds a long pole, traded for in Egum, and I light the roll. For a couple of minutes, sparklers, fireworks, noise, filling everything around us. A shock created, and in the simplicity of the open ocean it shakes us all — Eibes and I give each other a hug, like we just woke up. Orla feels it too. Music plays, and a rich chocolate cake full of candles brings everyone below. Happy birthday, Chelle. Everyone ends up dancing on deck under the stars, over the swells, the rainbow runners dancing along with us.

We're approaching Guam, another day,
engine still off, the biosphere with us,
everything protecting us, letting us be free,
while the world deals with tyranny. This
voyage has given us more than a taste of the
Pacific — Pacifico in all her splendor, a clear
sky lighting up the nights, brightening the
waves in deep ultramarine blue, the essence of
the color that made the best of Matisse and
Picasso, and we're living inside it.

Tonight the rainbow runners extend forever
around the ship, thousands of them, as we
glimpse the glare of Guam in the distance. A
magic voyage — they've been with us since the
start, arriving with us after five hundred miles
of open ocean, sea people traveling with their
allies, an army of rainbow warriors.

Four sperm whales greet us, telling me
we're on the right path, at the right time.
They're calving here, this time of year.

We could keep going.

4 April 2003

Guam

Almost a week in Guam now. American society speeds me up, retraining me for another world — truly another world from the one we came from. My mind knew it already; it's my body only now absorbing the impact. America is at war, though it's rarely spoken of here — we've landed in a world of sailors, seamen, sea lovers, and the immediacy of world events doesn't seem to touch the timelessness learned out on the open ocean.

As we approach Guam we're greeted by four sperm whales, come here to calve — a fantastic omen, as I catch seven rainbow runners off the bow on an unbaited hook. We enter the harbor with our army of a thousand of them, the sea calm now, escorted to our anchorage.

We meet remarkable sea people as we land. Chris greets us with champagne while customs and immigration clear us in — he's crossed the North Pacific himself, and in a few minutes downloads his whole sailing strategy: reach the forties, then ride them up and down, up when the wind weakens, down when the sea turns violent. Ernie, professor of oceanography, a macrobiologist at heart, takes the lead of the evening and we ride in the back of his pickup to a restaurant by the sea, its walls covered in naval memorabilia, the TV showing nothing but a brown desert and a few bomb blasts, nobody talking about it.

At the university, Ernie's office is a chaotic lab, test tubes, chemicals, a Pink Floyd CD, computers taken apart, his library, his photos and notes everywhere. I feel at ease there right away. A paper catches my eye: THE ART AND METAPHYSICS OF PLANNING OCEAN VOYAGES, a talk given by a man and his nephew who crossed and recrossed the Pacific, San Francisco to Guam, eight thousand miles on a raft — he left a few days before we arrived. The title stays with me; I use it in a Sunday-night speech of my own.

Reflections: why protect, why save the coral reef? Because they're beautiful. Because we need them — for the fish, of course, but also for the inspiration, the awe, the color. That color is everywhere now, painted, printed, on shower curtains and mugs and towels and walls. Why couldn't nature demand copyright on her own design, and put the fees into a fund for the reefs — "preserve the best, improve the rest," a phrase glimpsed on a T-shirt while I wait at the auto shop to get Ernie's car door fixed. If we can't change the system by stopping the destruction, let's work within it, using the given form.

Kujira

A week ago we heard of a tropical storm, potentially turning into a typhoon, born south of Chuuk and potentially heading for Guam. Suddenly every bit of attention shifted to preparing the ship to leave at a moment's notice — the rigging pulled apart on the main sails and put back as fast as possible, the right aluminum welder found, the right lashings bought from the fishing shop, the tuna given to us for free, everything falling speedily into place, though not without drama.

It's time to understand the behavior of one of planet ocean's mightiest powers, hurricane, cyclone, typhoon. Ferdi perfects the reception of satellite images broadcast over SSB. We know her now by a name: typhoon Kujira. A century ago, a man began naming highs and lows after people he liked or disliked; hurricanes, obviously, were named after his enemies.

The clouds tower majestically over our heads, high sheets of cirrus sucked toward the center of the storm like huge wings extending toward the horizon, the swells picking up. We race south, monitoring her advance, everyone gathering at broadcast time to see her path. For good reason — we're crossing it, and her direction and speed become key to our survival. Kujira is building, a hundred and twenty knots of wind forecast near the twenty-five-mile-wide center, moving west, while we race south. Every mile counts.

I go through my own internal cyclone, shifting in seconds between positive and negative states, watching every behavior like a hawk, sometimes brought down by what I perceive, but I need to hold strong. My body stays on constant standby, ready to move wherever, whenever needed. I have no fear, though I run the scenarios in my head, rehearsing knots and movements, inspecting the rigging, the galley. We run two-hour watches, fix the mizzen, change a few ropes, add extra baggywrinkles, hanging in the shrouds in a force six, seasick, but knowing it might save us a lot of trouble if the sea decides to turn mean.

Kujira moves slow, eight knots an hour, and it's well she does — if she sped up, we'd collide with her center. At times I wonder if we chose the right course; we might have done better going north, but once we've decided, we're in for it. Run, Heraclitus, run. The low to the north keeps her on a westerly course, even slightly south, and I watch her position anxiously, asking the gods of the sea to steer the monster north.

The swells are mad, the sea steered every which way, the light changing by the microsecond, and the ship is sailing — the engine off, at last. Heather falls in the galley; I take the twelve-to-four watch with Ferdi, enjoying the helm, playing with the sails and the wind, keeping the ship on a tight course, seven points behind the beam, sensing every swell. The ship behaves like a princess of the

sea, her stern caressed by the incoming water. A few baggywrinkles fall, but the rigging holds. We get a gust of thirty-five knots, the sea white with rain, a majestic sight.

Kujira runs away from us. The sky puts on every kind of cloud, mini-squalls with perfect lighting, and we curve around her edge, catching her last winds to get back on track for Guam. The moon is almost full; we've caught three fish now, the last a mahi mahi at one in the morning. We head north into the swells, uncomfortable but making five knots in the right direction, the seas calming, the northeast trades taking over again, like nothing ever happened.

We've all learned invaluable lessons, privileged to witness a "wonder" of nature from a safe distance. Just. The SSB became the tool to use, day after day, watching Kujira's progress, the surface analysis and the Guam coast guard's reports giving us the clues we needed. The Americans put her maximum winds over a hundred and twenty miles an hour; the Japanese put them at eighty. Culture, maybe, shaping the reading — the Americans going for bigger and stronger, the Japanese staying conservative.

I know another kind of storm is coming, the one that has to happen before we can leave at the right time — we're racing the season now, the window for the crossing slim, summer coming, June, July, August. We'll have to rely on the sails; once we reach the forties, it's a

straight shot, thirty-five hundred miles of tailwind, helped along by the Aleutian current. My confidence in the Heraclitus is as strong as ever — I've seen her in crazy swells, racing at eleven knots in forty-five, fifty knots of wind, steady, as long as we go with the flow of the sea. She's a junk, and junks are built to sail with the wind. So am I.

The eighteenth of April. As we untangle our fishing lines, twisted around themselves in some act of desperate union, Eddie sings Simbo tunes on the helm, enough to trigger memories. We catch up with each other, our own review of the dynamics on board, sharing what we each perceive. On the TV we watch footage of the Fujikawa Maru in Chuuk, and a hilarious fishing scene with Eibes. We talk for hours, losing all sense of time.

The nineteenth. Wind and rain let us sail almost to the entrance of Guam harbor; a moonrainbow leads the way in, and I can't sleep. We enter under twenty knots of wind, the excitement building. Gaie, Laser, Sebastien, Reka come out on Chris's little dinghy to make their own cyclonic center around us, high energies whirling, laughter, smiles, hugs, eyes like stars, friends rejoicing. I feel like I'm hanging between two worlds. The Heraclitus is safe, leaner than ever, the crew's spirit lifted, knowing that we can do this. The containers are already in port — ropes, blocks, a weatherfax, a satellite phone, a new life raft, a hard-bottom inflatable, food. How Gaie and Laser managed all of it in so

short a time is beyond rational explanation.
Magic is in the air.

A creative storm now, this task ahead of us, the art of navigation, inner and outer, of force ten and non-stop for two weeks. The world keeps blasting through the network — the war in Iraq, SARS, a respiratory disease still without a cure, the responses to both a hilarious soap opera transformable into a tragic drama of stupidity. Because France opposed the war, the U.S. renames french fries to freedom fries on restaurant menus across the country, boycotts French wine, French champagne. How low can you get?

Nicole arrives, from a Native American pueblo — I like her straight away, a big smile and a straightforwardness that warms the heart. Sebastien seems solid too, grounded; we have enough whirlpool personalities aboard already, and the grounders are essential.

A full house on board tonight, seventeen at the dinner table — Kira's father and sister have come to visit, and I'm sure to check whether he should let his daughter go on a three-month crossing. So many new faces, so many old ones renewed. I haven't slept in my own bunk in over a year, and last night, for the first time, I entered my own little palace. Details on the wall, objects and memories collected over years, all telling their story.

The twenty-fifth of April, a week later, moving at the speed of light. Our biggest event

this week was the power of the establishment coming down on us like I've never seen. The coast guard arrives at six-thirty in the morning, as the breakfast gong rings; everyone summoned on deck, an escort needed for anyone going below. The ship is completely taken over, ordered to a dock, the mainsail still out, tools and supplies scattered across the deck. Eibes performs his best docking yet under the eyes of fifty people ready to board us — DEA, customs, special forces, dogs, police, immigration, more weapons on board than in a Hollywood movie.

The search begins. They isolate people, question us one by one; they send in the good guy, working Orla with a friendly cover — just the fish guy, curious about the voyage. The dogs find nothing; the sniffers find nothing. But I'm nervous, wondering, with all the crowds who've come and gone, whether any residue could have shown up somewhere. They find a bosun's whistle and call it paraphernalia; Eibes takes it and blows through it to show them how it works — must have been a fine moment for him. Someone announces privately that they got "positive hits," that it would be best if we came forward. We stand our line, together, an ensemble. They pull out names, do their homework, twenty people with cameras taking our pictures one after another. We are invaded, every personal belonging searched, but we come out clean.

The week is mad with work, and today, Sunday, we have a mainsail back. All the speeches carry hints of how the takeover shook us for those few hours, but unlike the Biosphere 2 project, the black ship got away. How close that call was, and we're all on our toes now.

The twenty-ninth. As a first response to our invasion we watch the movie *Hair* with Gaie, Laser, and Orla — how appropriate, given what got us here. The ship was born out of the liberated spaces of the sixties. For the first time since her launch on the twenty-fourth of February, 1975, the *Heraclitus* will return to her birthplace. I don't personally call it home; her real home is the oceans and rivers of the world. The sea people carry the dream forward — like the ship herself, born in one place, remembering it, but carrying the flag of planet ocean.

Saturday, the third of May. The gods are with us, conspiring to meet our departure date — friends arriving at the right time, the right place, letting us know we're there.