I include a selection of quotations with each book. I find that using little excerpts like this to preface the story itself is something that can help a lot with establishing the mood, the themes of the story. They indicate to the reader how something is read, or suggest something which would be awkward or poorly suited to the narrative itself. I leave the interpretation of these excerpts to the reader; I write to provide questions, not answers.

I try to cite my sources for these excerpts clearly. Additionally, where the source material was in another language, whenever possible I try to include the original language as well as the translation. There are a few reasons for this. One is that I try to be respectful to the author of the work, and I think this is an important part of that. Presenting it only in English would, I think, suggest that I think the translated form is the authoritative version, and it's not.

In this case, though, it also contributes to the mood in itself. The idea of translation and of the difficulty and limitation inherent to it, the way that context and nuances and shades of meaning are lost when moving ideas from one language, one format, one perspective to another is something that plays a major role in this story's theming. The translated form does not capture the entirety of the original poem's structure, meaning, or sound.

If even just trying to translate a single poem loses so much nuance, how can one person ever hope to translate the whole of their experience of the world, with all its context and history and personal meaning and interpretation, into something another could understand?

Chapter One

Note that Japanese names are customarily presented with the family name before the personal name. Using this format her name would be styled as Sugiyama Kyōko, written 杉山 今日子(きょうこ). Translated literally, Sugiyama is “cedar mountain” and this written form of Kyōko is “child of today”. The first o in Kyoko is extended. In Japanese the idea of a cadence to spoken language is important; each *on* (an idea that corresponds to morae in linguistics) occupies the same amount of time. The diacritic mark (called a macron, if you’re curious) in Kyōko indicates that the o is extended to a second mora. I generally omit this diacritic in the text because I think it would become tedious, but she does pronounce it this way. Importantly, there is no vowel between the K and y in her name, and “kyo” is a single syllable. This is not a common pattern in English but is quite common in Japanese.

Kyoko does not follow the customary naming pattern; she generally uses the English format of the personal name followed by the family name. This is an intentional choice, not an oversight on my part. Other characters may follow the traditional form, for a variety of reasons. I will attempt to indicate this where relevant.

Audgrim's name is listed both in the traditional and anglicized forms. The primary difference is that in Auðgrímr there is an eth rather than a d. This is a character that is not used in modern English; it was in older English but has long since been dropped from standard use. It is pronounced with a soft “th” sound, similar to that in “father” or “this”. My ordinary preference when transliterating Norse into the Latin alphabet is to use either “th” or “dh” for eth, but given

that the whole point of him using the anglicized version is that it's pronounceable to more Americans, in this case it makes more sense for him to have just dropped it to d. The -r is the nominative suffix that follows the name when it is used in the nominative case. Icelandic and Old Norse names have declension rules, and there are other forms that would be used in other cases; I am unlikely to include those, as I feel that it would be needlessly confusing. I tend to either use the nominative declension in all cases or drop the declension suffix entirely, on a case-by-case basis.

Chapter Two

Plant names here are a bit inconsistent. Wolfsbane and foxglove, for example, use common English names (wolfsbane is an older name, and monkshood is the more prevalent English name currently; using wolfsbane instead is just a stylistic choice on my part). But belladonna uses that name rather than deadly nightshade. There are a few reasons for this, but mostly it will come down to clarity. "Nightshade" is also used to describe the entire family Solanaceae, not just the species *Atropa belladonna*, and so using that would be confusing. "Deadly nightshade" is a little more specific, but it's clunkier in my opinion, and in some ways it's still ambiguous. Solanaceae has over 2,500 species and a lot of them are toxic. Belladonna flows more easily and is more specific. I generally do not use Latin/scientific names in the text because I feel it would be cumbersome. For the curious, however:

Wolfsbane is an older name for monkshood, in this case *Aconitum napellus.* Foxglove is a common name for *Digitalis purpurea.* Belladonna as noted is *Atropa belladonna*. Hemlock is *Conium maculatum*. Water hemlock is the unrelated species *Cicuta maculata*. Autumn crocus is *Colchicum autumnale.* It is not a true crocus, but I think that name is more interesting than meadow saffron, and it's not a saffron either. Japanese skimmia is *Skimmia japonica*. Yellow jessamine is *Gelsemium sempervirens*. Blue lobelia is *Lobelia siphilitica*.

Chapter Three

Lacuna is an obscure word of Latin derivation, referring to an empty space where something used to be. It is mostly used in the jargon of various fields; it shows up in linguistics, biology, music, and mathematics, not casual speech. But it is considered a word in English, and that's what it means, a gap or vacancy, usually created by the absence of something.

The song Kyoko describes at the end of this chapter is inspired by a real song, "When the Wolves Return" by Ego Likeness.

Chapter Four

Jack Tar is an older slang term of uncertain derivation, referring to a sailor. As such, even beyond the oddity of Tar as a surname, this is clearly an assumed name. Áslaug is a traditional Scandinavian name; this written form is the form used in Old Norse. Note that there were numerous forms of Norse language, and as is fairly standard, the one I refer to as Old Norse is

generally going to be Old Icelandic. This is the language that most of the written records from that time period are in, so the term Old Norse is most commonly used to refer to Icelandic. The acute accent on the A indicates that the vowel is rounded, similar to the vowel sound in the English words “not” or “thought”. The s is pronounced as a hard s similar to that in “sit” or “stop” rather than softened to a z; this is essentially always the case in Norse writing.

I have attempted to translate the exchange in Japanese here in a way that preserves the meaning or context, but there are some elements that do not translate well. Presenting the original text, literal translation, and notes here. Please do correct me if I've made a mistake with this; my Japanese is rudimentary at best, and there may be some degree of error in either the conversation structure or translation.

Jack:　雷獣ですね。

Kyoko: はい、でも半分だけです。母はだったが、父は人間です。

Jack: あ、すみません。はじめまして、杉山さん、どうぞよろしくお願いします。

Literally:

Jack: (You) are a raiju, no? (Subject is often omitted in Japanese when obvious, so there's no actual “you” here, but it is understood whom he refers to. The use of “no” at the end suggests that this is not a question, but he wants to make the statement polite by indicating uncertainty. Strictly speaking raiju could be further translated to thunder-beast, but since it describes a specific creature in Japanese folklore, it would be confusing to translate it into an English phrase, and I use raiju without translation exclusively, for clarity.)

Kyoko: Yes, but (I) am only half. Mother was, but father is a human. (Subject is omitted again. Possessive markers also omitted, because it's clear whose parents she is referring to.)

Jack: Ah, my apologies. As we are meeting for the first time, Miss Sugiyama, I humbly request that you think well of me. (This is the trickiest translation. The term すみません [romanized “sumimasen”] literally means “the problem is not settled/resolved”, indicating a continued need for reparation. In practice it is a standard apology similar to “please excuse me”. “We are meeting for the first time” is standard in introductions. Using her name here is unusual, though; ordinarily he would introduce himself, and the fact that he doesn't provide his own name in this greeting is actually significant. Sugiyama-san is literally translated in this case as “Miss Sugiyama”, but it's imprecise. The -san is a suffix indicating honor or respect, and ubiquitous in Japanese. It does not have the notable formality or the implication regarding age that “Miss” might carry. The conclusion is standard, but adding the “onegaishimasu” to the end suggests greater formality and respect.)

Also, necrotizing fasciitis is a real condition. I highly recommend not looking at pictures of it. The most common cause is commonly referred to as flesh-eating bacteria, and if that name is unsettling, I assure you it just gets worse from there.

Chapter Five

The term “ljósálfar”, literally translated as “light elves”, refers to a group of elves in Scandinavian folklore. They are one of at least two, and possibly three, groups under the heading of álfar; there are also “dökkálfar”, or “dark elves”, and “svartálfar”, or “black elves”. Because elf is also used to refer to other beings from other folklore sources, I generally refer to these groups as álfar collectively, rather than translate it. The letter j in Norse text will always be read like the y in “yes” in English; as in Kyoko’s name, there is no vowel in between the l and j, which isn’t a pattern most English speakers use much. The acute accent on the a indicates that the vowel is open, somewhat similar to the vowel in English “hot” or “cot”. Norse generally uses -ar to mark plurals, so these terms are the plural form of the noun álfr. Strictly speaking -ar would apply to the alternative form alfr, while the accented form would be álfir, but this is a common adjustment and making the -ar ending more consistent seems worth the slight loss of accuracy. This is the same convention used with dvergr/dvergar. As mentioned earlier, all of these are in the nominative case, and I rarely use declension rules, so while it would in the source language vary further based on case, I am unlikely to do so.

It is not entirely clear what this difference indicated, or even whether the difference was introduced in the Prose Edda or was present in older source material. The álfar themselves can be confidently said to have existed in the Poetic Edda and sagas, but these subgroups are not well-attested outside of the Prose Edda. In the Prose Edda, the ljósálfar are described as being of fair complexion and live in the heavens, while the dökkálfar are black as pitch and live beneath the earth. In this setting, they do exist as meaningfully distinct groups, though tightly related ones. For svartálfar I use the common interpretation that they are very similar to, or perhaps just another word for, the dvergar.

Café is a direct adoption from French, and as is my usual policy, I attempt to hold to the source language rather than an adopted variant. In this case, as the e has an acute accent in the French word, I tend to include it rather than write it cafe.

Chapter Six

Kyoko and Saori both introduce themselves using only their personal names. This is *very* unusual in Japanese, and that they do this is important. You might think of it as a sort of informal handshake (in the computing sense, describing the process of establishing communication protocols) or shibboleth. It’s an understated way of communicating to each other that neither one is terribly attached to Japanese cultural norms.

Saori is pronounced with three syllables, Sa-oh-ri. The a is similar to the vowel in “gone” or “stalk”. Ri is the usual transliteration, but the sound is somewhat intermediate between English R and L; the vowel is similar to the vowel sound in “bee” or “deep”. In principle this does have a kanji representation as 早織, which is roughly “already woven”. She basically never uses that, though, and would find it weird if someone tried to write her name that way.

Kitsune is pronounced with three syllables, key-tsu-nay. This vowel pattern will hold true in Japanese. “A” is read as in “on”; “i” is pronounced with a long “e” sound as in “free” or “see”; “u” is similar to the vowel sound in “boot” or “soon”; “e” is pronounced with a long “a” sound compared

to English, and an e at the end of the word is never silent; “o” is pronounced as in “oh” or “so”. This transliteration system is based on vowel sounds in Latin, not in English (if you’re curious, it’s called the Revised Hepburn romanization system, and the full rules can be readily found online). Japanese does not exactly have plural nouns, a convention I generally follow. Words that are directly drawn from Japanese (e.g., kitsune, raiju, ninja, katana) are the same form for singular and plural use. Kitsune directly translates as “fox”, but is typically used without translation to refer to foxes as depicted in Japanese folklore and literature.

Also, Fleshgod Apocalypse is an actual band, and their logo is practically indecipherable as text at a glance unless you’re familiar with metal album cover art. Not actually that bad by those standards, plenty are less legible, but their name is too good not to use.

Chapter Seven

As an aside, the question of whether Kyoko has epilepsy is a very hard one to answer. She mentions some of why, and I have more detail in a separate essay, but to cover the abbreviated basics here: At the most basic level, epileptic seizures happen because portions of the brain have activity happening in rhythmic, synchronized ways that are cascading out of control, and it is diagnosed using an electroencephalograph to identify electrical patterns. This immediately suggests why the tests are useless; the EEG reports that she’s seizing, but she’s producing so much electricity in the process it fried the system.

In terms of rhythmic activity, and again to simplify greatly, when multiple parts of the brain are active at the same tempo, things start getting weird. Kyoko’s synesthesia will be discussed more later; here it suffices to say that the sensory processing activity in synesthesia seems related to epilepsy. In her case, then, it’s often hard to say whether it’s epileptic. It’s definitely a seizure, but everyone has a seizure threshold. It’s possible that even without epilepsy, the amount of information she’s getting and which is spread across multiple senses while her brain tries to make sense of it would push her over.

So overall, between supernatural perception, completely breaking the main diagnostic tool, and the strangeness that happens when multiple different conditions are all involved in one outcome, there’s basically zero chance of getting a confident answer. Her experiences do also involve typical photosensitive seizures, though, and in a practical sense treating it as photosensitive epilepsy is reasonable.

The music Saori plays here is directly inspired by a real song, as is a surprising amount of the music I use while writing her. In this case, the song is “Khar Khulz,” by Uuhai.

Saori and Kyoko are sexual with each other after very little time knowing each other. This is written to show character traits of each of them, not as random fanservice, and I hope that’s apparent. Since this is the first time that sex is a meaningful topic in the story, I think it's also a good time for a note on that. I don’t include explicit sex scenes, but that’s because I feel they don’t add enough to the story for how long they are. Sexuality is a significant theme, and there might be some pretty obscene commentary or allusions.

Chapter Eight

Saori's appearance was not described in depth earlier. For that matter, Kyoko's appearance has been described only in very broad-strokes ways. This is likely to continue to be a thing; visual descriptions tend to be less prominent in my writing than in a lot of stories. There are a few reasons for this. One, in this story at least, is that Kyoko's own perceptions are so complex and unusual. She is also very much aware that for a lot of the powerful people in this setting, appearance is not a reliable indicator of much. Many, perhaps most, supernatural creatures age differently than humans, or not at all. Many powerful entities can change their own appearance more or less at will. Since she knows this, she doesn't like to rely on someone's appearance for cues.

There is also a reason, however, that applies more broadly. I believe strongly in the adage "write what you know", and there's a reason I'm writing someone with sensory oddities. Mine include a deficit in visual processing and memory. I don't remember faces; I struggle with imagery, spatial tasks, coordination, most visual-spatial tasks are limited and some are developmentally impaired. People say my handwriting looks like the contents of the Necronomicon, and my record for getting lost is currently set at six times while trying to walk two blocks in a straight line; I do not know how that is even a thing, but it was a thing. I think that because of this I tend not to include as much visual description as most authors. This part is not an intentional stylistic choice, and if you ever want more description of how someone or something looks, please do let me know. I'm happy to edit it in; I just forget that it would be helpful for people sometimes.

As another note, they settle on an open or nonmonogamous relationship very readily. This is another intentional choice on my part that shows some important character traits, though the full details of why may take a while to become clear. I think this may feel odd or surprising to some people, given that exclusivity in sexual relationships is seen by many people as desirable or even mandatory. That, I think, makes this a good time to mention another detail about this story: Characters may not conform to societal norms in a lot of cases, for a lot of reasons. If you prefer to avoid this kind of non-normative behavior or lifestyle pattern, you may have issues with this story.

This is the first time the phrase "in skin" is used here, and it's one that I want to comment on. Using "in skin" and "in fur" to describe shapeshifting will show up routinely, and these phrases were selected for a number of reasons. One is that it's quick, simple, and easy to understand. Plus, it's generalized. A werewolf and a kitsune are very different creatures with different kinds of shapeshifting, but both of them can use this system easily. And then the last reason is maybe a little less obvious: It's meaningless if you don't know what they mean. This is important, because people are using these phrases in places that humans might hear. If someone happens to overhear you saying you were with a friend "in skin" it is going to be relatively easy to pass that off as a misheard word, or a casual in-joke. Similarly, "in fur" might just describe someone wearing fur clothing, or be passed off as "in for" as an idiom with no difficulty at all. This type of phrase, where the meaning is conveyed clearly and concisely while still being obscured, is what I typically see used in subcultures that have similar needs.

The music Saori plays here is based on music by Gunhild Carling.

Chapter Nine

The scene with Steven's corpse shows, and I suppose that this was already visible when Kyoko examined Chris's body as well, another thing that I feel I should note about the story's content. I can get fairly graphic and fairly gruesome when describing violence and the aftermath thereof. There are reasons for this in terms of the story's themes and mood; as with sexual elements, it's not something I do just for shock value. But if you prefer to avoid that kind of graphic violence, this...may be a bit problematic for you.

Chapter Ten

Eyvindson is an odd surname here, for reasons that require some degree of explanation. Icelandic traditionally uses patronyms (i.e., Eyvindson would imply that his father was named Eyvindr, and not that he inherited a family name). The other system in older Norse cultures was bynames, which were titles or descriptors applied to someone. Modern Icelandic names still use patronyms, though other Scandinavian cultures mostly do have inherited surnames these days. Audgrim was not, however, named by modern standards, and definitely does have a patronym here. But it's his mother (Áslaug, mentioned earlier by Jack) who is a dvergr, and his father who's human. Normally in this situation the name of the dvergr would take precedence. That it didn't has implications.

Also, his employee calls him Mr. Eyvindson. This is not a way you would refer to him in the source language; his name is Audgrim, not Eyvindson. Eyvindson just says who his father was and distinguishes him from other people named Audgrim; this is a common mistake in the real world when referring to Icelandic people. His employee does not know this. Again, implications.

VNC will almost always be referred to by that acronym rather than the full name; Kyoko lists out the names of the partners here because she's explaining what the acronym means. Nilsen and Casimir are both European surnames. Varkalnen does not quite match any name or word in a human language. It turns up zero entries on a google search (though I suppose that may change with this story). This is intentional.

As a final note, the word housekarl is tricky to fully characterize. To start with, it's hard to say whether it's written like that or as housecarl. The latter is more standard in writing, but when it was first being used was before the letter c really existed in the area. Runic writing does not distinguish it from k, and until the Latin alphabet became prominent it would have been written that way. I chose this version largely because when in conflict I prefer to use the native version of a word, but it's arguable how apt either form is. In any case, it refers to the close personal attendants of a leader. With how Norse culture was structured, political and military leaders were generally the same people, and they generally had a retinue of housekarls. These people can be simply described as combining traits of bodyguards, knights, and political inner circle. Viking, meanwhile, refers to someone who goes raiding overseas; it was not used for the people or culture as a whole, but it did have that meaning. What Kyoko is saying is essentially that a jarl had to be as personally dangerous in a fight as his elite soldiers, his bodyguards and the career vikings in his service. If he wasn't, he was likely to be losing that leadership position, probably violently, because

that was often the nature of the society.

Chapter Twelve

Another example of characters not adhering to normative behavior: Both Saori and Kyoko see recreational drug use as entirely fine. Kyoko has numerous plants, between various psychoactives and poisons, that she is not legally allowed to have. It does not register as meaningful to her.

The technique she's describing here is loosely adapted from aigamae ate, one of the most fundamental aikido techniques. Ordinarily, after breaking the attacker's balance and grasping their arm, the aikidoka would essentially reverse their movement and use the attacker's momentum to further pull them off balance, then push them over. While it resembles a strike to the face, this technique does not generally involve actually hitting someone so much as simply pushing them. This is in keeping with aikido's general principle or philosophy of using body mechanics and momentum rather than strength, on the logic that if you are relying upon physical strength to perform a technique then you will not be able to use it if you encounter someone stronger than you are, but body mechanics and physics are essentially universal.

Kyoko is instead using a hook, punching up into the attacker's abdomen. This is an easy adaptation to make, and it's one she uses for a number of reasons. One is that she is much stronger than most people, and she knows it, which means that relying upon her strength will be feasible in a lot of situations. The other is that body mechanics are much less universal when the attacker may not be human, but physics remain the same; thus, the emphasis on momentum is something she keeps, but she doesn't rely as much on the attacker having the same balance and body structure that humans do. Punching someone goes back to simple physics, and will cause damage to pretty much anyone if you hit them hard enough.

I mention this mostly to help illustrate her comment in the narration here. Martial arts are designed for and by humans, for use on humans. Substituting a hook here is not in line with aikido's principles or practice, but those principles are a tool, one developed for a specific set of needs. If your needs are not the same as human standard, continuing to use tools designed for that standard without adaptation is foolish. So while she has kept the basic concepts, and she does still know how to use the technique as it was initially developed (though she's out of practice at this point), Kyoko has to adapt the instruction to her different nature and circumstances.

Chapter Thirteen

The Yakuza is a complex Japanese social institution; for this purpose, it can be very loosely summarized as organized crime families akin to the Mafia. Kyoko has actually indicated her history of affiliation with them already, though it was subtle. She has a lot of visible tattoos on her arms and hands, colorful depictions of flowers, wolves, snakes, and clouds (among other things; those are the most prevalent motifs, but she has a *lot* of ink). Tattoos occupy a complicated place in Japanese culture, and were illegal until relatively recently. Visible tattoos and especially extensive tattoos in a traditional style such as Kyoko is displaying here have historically been seen as very strongly

associated with the Yakuza. Not all of hers happened in Japan, but most did, and she makes a point of displaying them as a bit of a joke: She knows that she's very openly flaunting criminal history, and that few, if any, people around her will realize it.

The discussion on wolves is accurate and is part of why the idea of alpha werewolves does not exist in this setting. Wolves generally live as small, nuclear-family units in the wild, with some exceptions based on environment; pack hierarchy and dominance struggles happen in zoos, not forests. Werewolves have little if any innate pressure towards large groups and strict hierarchies. These are things that they, like wolves, do because of an external pressure that obligates them to maintain larger groups who do not necessarily share close bonds. The only reason they're called packs rather than another term is that the wolf association stuck pretty hard. But mentioning alpha wolves or anything related to them is very likely to get you decked by a werewolf who has heard those comments way more times than they would like.

They do have an association with the moon, though. And wolves do not, not really; they howl at sunset and sunrise much more than anything related to lunar cycles. This mismatch is not an accident on my part.

Chapter Fourteen

This etymology is accurate; the name Melissa derives from the Greek μέλισσα (mélissa), “honeybee.”

Alexithymia is a word that shows up mostly in clinical psychology, referring to an inability to recognize, identify, and understand one’s own emotions. As with many psychological traits, it’s spectral in nature, and a lot of people experience this without it escalating to the point of causing serious problems. It is common in autistic people, and can cause significant personal and social problems when it’s happening routinely and at high intensity. My own affect is complicated and beside the point at the moment, but I do exhibit marked alexithymia and many of the ways it impacts Melissa are drawn from my own experience. Her restricted affect which centers on cheerful regardless of actual feeling is also inspired by my own experience in complex ways that may be discussed more later.

Cognitive dissonance, inappropriate affect, and incongruent affect are all also terms drawn from clinical and research psychology. As a very brief summary, cognitive dissonance refers to a discomfort felt when one’s actions are not in accord with one’s own values or desires; inappropriate affect is when an emotional response to something is different than what would be expected (e.g., giggling happily upon learning that your friend just died); and incongruent affect is when the emotion someone is expressing and the emotion they feel or say they’re feeling are markedly different from one another (e.g., saying that you feel grief-stricken following that friend’s death, but you seem euphoric outwardly). Again, very brief and simplified descriptions here. I think it’s enough to see what Kyoko means, though; Melissa was driven to do things she didn’t agree with, to feel things that she didn’t have a reason to be feeling or which were actively opposed to her natural response, and to feel things internally pulling her in multiple directions at once at this kind of intensity. All of these were damaging.

Chapter Fifteen

The song mentioned here, surreal electronica about checking one's tie, is based on something real. The song in question is "When I Was Young", by Genesis P-orridge and Astrid Monroe.

The idea of Seelie and Unseelie Courts, as well as many other details about them in this setting, is a bit syncretic. The terms come from the British Isles, where various local variations of those words were used to distinguish between kind and unkind faeries. (I use the spelling fae and faerie both because of etymology and the cultural associations around "fairy" not fitting well. Fey is a very different, archaic word I use as an adjective, not as a term for the fae; the etymology is unrelated.) But a lot of the details are things I had to fit together from a wide variety of source material, much of which contradicts itself. Odd responses to iron are common, as is a deep fixation on debts and oaths. The idea that they cannot tell a lie is something that shows up often in modern fiction; the source I use for it, though, is mostly the legend of Thomas the Rhymer. In a traditional Scottish ballad, he met "the Queen of Elfland" and returned with an uncanny gift of prophecy and an inability to tell any kind of lie. Because this is the first mention of a Faerie Queen as a concrete idea I can find, I assign that ballad a fair amount of weight when I work with these ideas. Elfland and Fairyland are common motifs throughout the British Isles in one form or another, all the way back to the Celtic Otherworld which features in stories about the Tuatha Dé Danann of myth.

So these stories do have common elements, but patching them together into a cohesive whole is difficult. It's not clear how far back the idea of a Faerie Queen goes; it has parallels in the Celtic mythical sources, but details are sparse. It can at least be traced back to the Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer (c. 1200AD), but that's as far back as I can find concrete mention of the idea. The Sidhe are generally thought to be the descendants and inheritors of the Tuatha Dé Danann, but also got mixed up with Christian elements in ways that can be hard to parse out.

As I've mentioned elsewhere, I try to be respectful to the source material I draw upon and the cultural ideas I use in my writing. In this case, that had to be balanced against the need for a specific, concrete setting element. The Otherworld, or Elfland in the later material, became a part of the broader system of worlds referred to as the Otherside in this setting, which will be discussed in much greater depth later. I prefer the name Faerie for this domain because I find that Fairyland has all the wrong connotations. The Seelie and Unseelie Courts do exist; adding descriptors of day and night is my addition, and is explicitly called out as just the most recent of a long line of epithets. All of the fae are bound to be truthful and to keep their oaths; many are harmed by iron. There are Faerie Queens, but details and names are complex and will be discussed later on. This note is already a long one.

Chapter Sixteen

Adar Mân Y Mynydd is a traditional Welsh folk song, one which is fairly obscure and old. It does still get performed, though; you can find a number of renditions online. The song's title is translated as "Little Birds of the Mountain", and the lyrics are:

Yr eos a'r glân hedydd
Ac adar mân y mynydd,
A ei di'n gennad at liw'r haf
Sy'n glaf o glefyd newydd?

Does gennyf ddim anrhegion
Na jewels drud i'w danfon
I ddwyn i gof yr hwn a'ch câr,
Ond pâr o fenig gwynion.

Yr adar mân fe aethant
I'w siwrnai bell hedasant
Ac yno ar gyfer gwely Gwen
Hwy ar y pren ganasant.

Dywedai Gwen lliw'r ewyn
Och fi, pa beth yw'r deryn
Sydd yma'n tiwnio nawr mor braf
A minnau'n glaf ar derfyn?

Cenhadon ym gwnewch goelio
Oddi wrth y mwyn a'ch caro,
Gael iddo wybod ffordd yr ych
Ai mendio'n wych a'i peidio.

Dywedwch wrtho'n dawel
Mai byr fydd hyd fy Hoedel,
Cyn diwedd hyn o haf yn brudd
A'n gymysg bridd a grafel.
Dywedwch wrtho :: O ddwedwch wrtho
Translation:
The nightingale and the spotless lark
And the little birds of the mountain,
Wilt thou go as messenger to summer's colour
Which is suffering from a new illness?

I have no gifts
Nor expensive jewels to send
To remind you of him who loves you,
But a pair of white gloves.

The little birds did go
On their distant journey they flew
And then facing Gwen's bed
On the tree they sang.

Said Gwen the colour of the foam
Ah me, what thing is the bird
Which is here warbling now so prettily
And I terminally ill?

We are messengers please believe
Sent on behalf of the one who loves you
To let him know how you are faring
Whether you are growing hale or not.

Tell him softly
That short will be my lifetime,
Before this summer ends sadly
I am going to be among soil and gravel.
Tell him :: O tell him
translated by Richard B Gillion, 2008

Chapter Seventeen

Kyoko provides dates both for herself and the story in this chapter. She was born 20 March 1987, and the story opens in September 2022. The attack she is describing is real, and played out roughly how it's depicted here. Citing her age and the current date against that known event provides a reference point that anchors these points of the timeline.

Her description of the timing isn't quite accurate, incidentally. The equinox was on 21 March both in 1987 and 1995—in Japan. Kyoko was actually born in San Francisco, though. Her father is a salaryman working for a tech company, and while he wasn't as highly placed then, he was still in a position which involved extensive travel. The U.S. confers citizenship based on location of birth, and he felt that for her to have dual citizenship would be useful, which is most of why he made sure the timing worked out this way. In theory, she would have had to either

renounce that citizenship or lose her Japanese citizenship at age of majority, due to Japanese legal codes; in practice it's unlikely that this would have been enforced in her case for several reasons.

Anyway, the point is that the equinox happens at the same time worldwide but time zones mean that it's not always the same date. In California, the equinox (as defined in astronomy) happened on 20 March, which is when she was born. In Japan, the subway sarin attack was the day before the equinox, but still on her birthday. She didn't try to explain this whole thing because she felt that getting bogged down in time zone quirks when talking to Capinera (who has little exposure to earthly calendars at all) would have gotten confusing.

I try to maintain a respectful tone when I am working with material that involves other cultures. Obviously, in this case that is particularly important, given that the material I'm integrating is a fairly recent and very emotionally charged historic event. The subway sarin attack in Tokyo remains the most damaging act of domestic terrorism in Japanese history. I very much hope that it does not feel as though I am using that attack as part of this story in a way that is disrespectful or that feels like I am using it for shock value. I've researched the context of the attack, and I have tried to present it in a way that acknowledges that context; if I didn't succeed in doing this in a respectful and culturally sensitive way, please do let me know and I can edit as needed.

In particular, I want to mention that I actually did not initially mean to have Kyoko's history mapped this tightly to the attack. Her birthday was selected because it was the vernal equinox (locally, autumnal in the southern hemisphere of course) and she lived in Tokyo for other story reasons. So while I did end up incorporating it as a major story element, it was proximate in both time and space by sheer coincidence.

Kyoko's attitude about the attack is also something I want to mention here. She's talking about Aum Shinrikyo very contemptuously, describing the attack as incompetent and ineffective. This is an intentional choice on my part. Kyoko was badly traumatized by this event, despite not being directly present. She has a lot of trauma and survivor's guilt going on.

Her response to that trauma is to dissociate, and to regard the cult with contempt. She describes the event in this detached way because if the topic is the attack itself rather than her experiences, she doesn't have to think as much about her reaction to the event. She is contemptuous and dismissive because she does not feel they deserve the dignity of being taken seriously. It is not because I am, myself, trying to be dismissive of the harm done.

Chapter Eighteen

As with the sarin attack in Tokyo, the earthquake being mentioned here is a real event in recent history. Similarly to that, I hope that I don't give the impression here of using that event for shock value or handling it in a disrespectful way. I could have used a fictional natural disaster, but I felt that doing this anchored the story more tightly and helps to establish that Kyoko's world is relatively close to contemporary, real world history.

Kyoko is casual about it because she's scared of these episodes and feels guilt, even though there really wasn't much she could have done about it. Even if she'd known what was going on and identified what was about to happen, there is very little a random teenager can do about a major

earthquake, and logically she knows this. But she still feels that sense of guilt. She responds to that feeling by downplaying the importance of the events associated with this vision.

Werewolves are ageless, as was implied before this. There are a few reasons for this, in-universe; they might be examined more closely later on. For now, this comment about Andrew's age mostly confirms that yes, there are werewolves who are hundreds of years old and still look like young adults. Also, I typically use ageless rather than immortal to refer to beings that do not physically age or die of old age; this is a stylistic choice on my part.

Chapter Nineteen

Kyoko's explanation here draws on a few things. The types of synesthesia she mentions here are known things; auditory-color is called chromoesthesia, and then auditory-tactile doesn't have a more specific name. I have attempted to depict both of these in a relatively clear way. A lot of it is drawing on my own experiences; I'm a little less prone to chromoesthesia than she is and more prone to auditory-tactile, but I do experience both of these. Other details about it draw on current scientific understanding to the best of my ability. As is usually the case, her synesthesia is one-way; sound becomes color, but color does not become sound.

The bird being discussed with Capinera is the Eurasian blackcap, a songbird which is common in many parts of Europe. Its name is essentially the same in a lot of European languages; Capinera is blackcap in Italian both as a word-pair and in use referring to the bird. Because it is an Italian word, it follows Latin vowel patterns and is pronounced with four syllables. The first element is close to the English word "copy". In the latter, the "e" is pronounced with the vowel in English words like "way" or "say", and the "a" is pronounced the same as the first, with a sound similar to that in "cot" or "hot".

Clíodhna is a primarily-Irish figure in folklore associated, though in uncertain and inconsistent ways, with banshees. As she is known from folklore and oral history more than formal writing, regional inconsistencies are common and even within a region versions differ. The most prevalent interpretation is that she was the queen or leader of banshees, which in turn are a type of Sidhe with complex and fluctuating traits in folklore. They are consistently associated with song, particularly lamentation, and with death. Whether their song is actually harmful or just presages death is variable, with older sources more often suggesting grief than harm. Her name is pronounced with a vowel similar to the Latin i, while the "odh" section is silent (note that this is a simplification of Irish orthography, but in this case it is sufficient). The overall pronunciation is somewhat similar to "Kleena" in English orthography, as a loose summary.

Chapter Twenty

This is another place where it's challenging to balance using existing cultural material respectfully with creating a cohesive, consistent setting. Even the term shamanism is complicated and contentious; there are a ton of traditions that are described with that word, and the tendency to treat them as equivalent is in itself unfortunate. Magic, in general, has been described in so many ways and viewed in so many ways throughout time that creating a single framework within this setting to describe it is inevitably going to lose some of those details. I try to be respectful, and in

particular to maintain that distinction between the cultural tradition and the supernatural mechanisms that in this setting are underlying that tradition, but it's always challenging to balance these needs.

Chapter Twenty-One

As naïve is a direct borrowing, I follow the source language's form.

Hrafna, as noted, is the feminine form of "Hrafn", "raven". Hrafn is a common name element which also sees use as a name in itself and is very well attested; variations are still used in a number of Scandinavian languages. In Icelandic orthography an f before an n shifts in sound to something a little closer to a b; Hrafna's name is thus a little closer to Hrabna relative to how English would usually pronounce the letters. There is no vowel between the H and r, a pattern which does not show up much in English. The second name is a byname, as noted in the narration, and was not inherited. It means "redcloak", more or less. The element "feldr" can be translated in a few ways, and which I use will tend to vary based on a variety of factors.

The most direct translation is "fell" in the obscure English sense of "an animal skin, hide, or pelt", and that's sometimes what I use, but because that use is so obscure it's a little unclear. "Skin" or "hide" is perhaps easier, but in practice the term is more likely to refer to a garment than to one's own skin (as in the modern Icelandic form feldur, which is translated as "coat" or "pelt"), and so the translation I use when I do translate this will vary a bit. Given that Hrafna is, as shown, wearing a fabric cloak rather than furs, I would in this case consider "redcloak" to probably be the better translation. In any case, it is a relatively well-attested byname from Old Norse use and it does suggest that she has in some sense earned that as a title.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Ice Nine Kills is a real musical group, and did two full albums themed around horror movies and especially slasher movies.

The building mentioned which has lights to show a weather forecast is real. Called the Gulf Tower, it has a pyramid at the top which is lit in various colors, visible from a distance. These colors are a code used to express a simple weather forecast. The 39th floor shows wind speed, the 40th humidity, the 41st precipitation, and the 42nd to 44th show temperature. The code used is fairly simple, so the forecast it gives isn't a particularly detailed one, but it does exist.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Saitō Ryōsuke is presented in the traditional Japanese surname-first format; Saito is his family name, Ryosuke is the personal name. In Japanese this is styled as 斉藤 良介（りょうすけ）. Saito is loosely "equivalent wisteria" (wisteria is a very common element in Japanese family names for complex historical reasons) and this form of Ryosuke is something like "good help/mediation". As with other transliteration of Japanese this follows Latin vowel patterns. The ō having a macron diacritical mark indicates that the vowel in both cases is extended to a second count; as with Kyoko's name I do not generally include this diacritic in the text because I feel that it would be

needlessly cumbersome relative to its usefulness as a pronunciation aid.

Ashland is an actual town in New York state, near the northern edge of the Catskill mountains. To the best of my knowledge, it is not run by a werewolf. Jacob Snow is, however, a name I borrowed from an old record I found which claims he was one of the first Europeans to settle in the area, c. 1800. There are also some interesting comments about wolves in the area in that record. I try to incorporate material like that where possible.

Cerdinen is a Welsh word for rowan; rowan is a particularly significant tree in many traditions throughout Europe, and in Britain in particular it was often used as a charm or talisman to protect against faeries and witchcraft.

The knives mentioned here are based on real materials. Plastic-fiberglass composite knives have become very cheap in recent years, and are, if not great, at least functional without having any metal in them. The dagger is slightly more exotic, but there are aluminum alloys which involve little to no iron and are strong enough for the task (they're mostly used in aircraft). Titanium carbide is a very hard material which can be used to create a very sharp, durable edge. It's used in machining tools, among other things, for when you need a blade to be hard enough to cut materials like gemstones or metal. I'm not entirely sure that this exact model actually exists, but the techniques for making it do.

The music Saori is playing here is real, composed by the German band Subway to Sally. This specific song is titled „Sieben".

Chapter Twenty-Four

The music mentioned in this chapter is real. The power metal playlist was inspired by Powerwolf, primarily their songs "Amen & Attack", "Wolves Against the World", and "Sacred & Wild". They have plenty of others on similar themes, and Saori was just playing one after another while waiting for the werewolves to make sure they heard her stop when they got there. The metal song following, meanwhile, is "NEVER TO RETURN", by Infected Rain.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Saori's gun is a carbine, a shorter and lighter variation of a rifle. This makes it less accurate at long range and less powerful, but much lighter weight, and easier to use in close quarters. It does still fire a rifle calibre, which makes the loss in stopping power relatively small compared to a carbine which uses a handgun calibre round. They're popular in a lot of circumstances these days, particularly among high-mobility fighters like special forces units. Hers is selective fire, meaning that it can be used either as a fully automatic weapon or a semiautomatic one. Full-auto firearms are illegal for the vast majority of civilians to own, but as should probably be clear by now, Saori really doesn't care.

Similarly, a wakizashi is a lighter and shorter Japanese sword, traditionally paired with the larger katana. Saori generally only uses the wakizashi, for a number of reasons. It's lighter, and thus better suited for her quick, agile mode of combat. It's also more useful for fights in close quarters and cramped environments, where it's less likely to get caught in furniture, and Saori has gotten in

a lot of fights indoors or in urban settings. In principle she could also carry a larger sword, but in practice she has found that she rarely uses it, and the added weight and bulk would just get in the way. When she wants a second blade she uses a knife.

A minor note regarding phrasing, as well. Kyoko refers to herself in the narration as “a beast of the storm”. This is not an idle word choice. Raiju, written 雷獣, literally translates as thunder-beast. I do not generally use the translated form, because the creature being described is specifically the yokai from Japanese folklore. I also don’t think that thunder quite conveys the full meaning; Raijin was certainly associated with and named for thunder or lightning, but he is also depicted with clouds or other elements of a storm, and I tend to think that “thunder” can be understood in this case more clearly as “thunderstorm”. English also generally does not use this form of compound noun; referring to something as a thunderbeast would register strangely in standard writing. As a result, “beast of the storm” is about how I would translate the term raiju. It conveys the association and tone more clearly than either “thunder-beast” or “beast of thunder” in my opinion. With this in mind, what Kyoko is saying is essentially that she has markedly more of the raiju in her than the human at this instant.

Deathstalker is the common name for a number of scorpions in the genus *Leiurus*, particularly *L. quinquestriatus. Leiurus* scorpions are distributed throughout northern Africa, the Middle East, and the Arabian peninsula. They are among the most dangerous scorpions in the world, with venom that poses an unusually great risk to humans; fatalities are not uncommon, particularly among children or the elderly, and the venom is unusually resistant to treatment with antitoxins. It is primarily neurotoxic, like most scorpion venom, and produces rigid paralysis and spastic convulsions within a matter of seconds; this paralysis progresses through the body rapidly, and lasts for hours. Cause of death is usually respiratory failure.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Fun fact: In the first draft of this book, Andrew was named Jason. That name was selected early on in the story’s planning, more or less at random. I managed to get through this scene and halfway through the next book’s draft before realizing that I’d written a character named Jason who was incredibly durable and physically very strong chasing people through the forest with a machete. I even had the description in this chapter of him as looking like an extra in a horror movie. I considered keeping it just because it was so comical as a coincidence, but ultimately it felt like the resemblance to the *Friday the 13th* films was so strong it would come off as a tacky reference and changed it.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

I use nithing rather than níðing in the text for a number of reasons. One is readability, but there is also another element. The word was used in a wide variety of languages over a prolonged period of time, and it was not written the same way in each. It's attested as níðingr, nīðing, nīþing, niðgæst...the list just keeps going. In Old Norse it would be níðingr, but with so many variations on the word, it just makes more sense in this case to write it phonetically.

Nithing, as noted in the narration here, is a challenging word to define or translate. It's the noun form of the adjective nith, meaning a person who is or expresses nith, but it's hard to fully define what that means. It has connotations of effeminacy or homosexuality, but it isn't quite that simple. The sexually charged nature of its use is readily apparent, but it seems to have had more to do with sexual passivity in many ways than with homosexuality (many uses involve one man implying he's going to or already has sexually dominated the other), and it's hard to say how much of the sexual association was as a proxy for other traits, or how much was being added to make an insult more intense by incorporating obscenity. It was applied to women, and even when applied to men, it had a much more nuanced meaning than just a lack of masculinity. While the standard translation of nith is "unmanliness", it is perhaps better understood as "dishonor". It is, incidentally, the same root that led to "beneath", and "person who is beneath contempt" captures the idea reasonably well.

It implies treachery or cowardice, and often implies secretive, illicit murder, particularly using tools like magic or poison rather than open combat. Themes of betrayal, oathbreaking, violation of truces, desecrating sacred ground, and a variety of other crimes are all associated with the idea. A nithing was someone who was seen as being beneath contempt, and failing to contest the accusation with intensity up to and including lethal force was a severe stain on a person's honor or reputation.

Is it applicable to Audgrim in this scene? I would tend to think so. Cowardice, treachery, a lack of concern for his own honor, a desire to avoid the consequence of his choices, the use of illicit methods to kill someone, and the attempt to conceal that murder are all apt. Kyoko isn't concerned with the sexual or gender-based pieces of the idea, but the broader cultural meaning and connotations are accurate enough to merit the word's use here.

So, on the whole, when Kyoko's narration here describes this accusation as being one that was so extreme within dvergr culture as to provoke a lethal honor duel just from having said this, she's not exaggerating at all. I tend to use that older Norse cultural material heavily when I'm working through what kinds of culture and society races such as the dvergar have, and this is absolutely something that would have been met with that kind of reaction in that historic and cultural context. The specific response varied by time and place, but it was always a profound insult, and there were contexts when failing to contest it in a duel would have been an extreme, possibly lethal stain on one's honor.

Also, just because I like this detail, the amber inlay in Thorn is significant for a couple reasons. One is that it's consistent with how Gram was described in the sagas. The blade is implied to be golden or brown, and given it was pulled out of a tree, a golden color seems to suggest amber to me. It's also of note that amber is able to hold a static electric charge very well. The word electricity is itself taken from the Greek word for amber: ἤλεκτρον, "elektron". Steel is also conductive, and silver is the most electrically conductive metallic element, so Thorn is extremely capable of holding lightning. Given who's holding Thorn, that's a big deal.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The tattoo style being referenced here, which was mentioned in an earlier note, is a traditional

form called irezumi, written 入れ墨. This word literally translates to “insertion of ink”, and it can also refer to other forms of tattooing, but when it's used in English, it's generally referring to a specific practice. Traditional irezumi is a slow, expensive, and painful process. The ink is applied by hand with a needle rather than using a machine. Traditionally, the artist is the one who primarily decides on the design, and the subject has relatively limited input on it. This isn't always the case, of course, especially in more recent years as tattoos have become somewhat less stigmatized and foreign influence on the practice has become more pronounced.

But Kyoko got much of her work done in that traditional way, and she didn't really pick what she displays. These motifs are common in irezumi work; flowers, animals, and natural phenomena like clouds are all fairly common elements. The fact that she has her hands tattooed as well is significant. The Yakuza subculture has historically emphasized tattoos a great deal for complex cultural reasons that will be discussed in more detail later, but the most common format for extensive tattoos in that context leaves the hands and face blank. This allows for the tattoos to be hidden under clothing relatively easily. She did not do that, and she would have a hard time fully concealing hers, which was an intentional choice on her part; it is not an oversight on mine.

The denouement in this chapter is a little heavier on narration and exposition than I usually try to be. This is typical of my work. I find that having that more introspective, contemplative tone is often useful for establishing the right mood when doing denouement at the end of a book. It helps to establish context and tone, and often I want to summarize more events than would be useful to write out in detail, to suggest where things go after the story ends.

This is the last full chapter of *Seed and Trellis*, and I would consider the closing line of this chapter to be the last real line of the book. There’s an epilogue to follow, but it’s serving a different role, and this is the last scene that I would think of as part of the story of this book.

Epilogue

Here, as is somewhat common for me, the epilogue is set after the end of the book. I think of it as being a little bit like a stinger in filmmaking, a scene set after the story has wrapped up and the credits have already rolled. The previous chapter has the thematic and narrative conclusion, and I would say that the last sentence in it is the conclusion of the book’s story. The epilogue, then, is a smaller scene which provides a slight break or a different mood. It sets up future developments or presents something that doesn't quite fit into this book's story but which has to happen before the next starts. This isn't the only narrative structure I'm prone to use, but it is a common one.

In this case, the scene is focused on Raincloud. It's another exposition-heavy one, because I wasn't sure how else to incorporate some key details. The discussion of Siberian huskies being close to wolves is accurate. The exact genetic descent of dogs is *very* complicated, but there are some key traits held in common between grey wolves and a number of Arctic-derived breeds of dog. It's not an exact match by any stretch of the imagination, but it's probably closer than almost any other breed of domestic dog. (This is discounting wolfdogs, primarily because treating those as being the same as domesticated dogs is generally a very bad idea. Kyoko has reasons to be avoiding that as a solution here.)

Also, as an aside because it hasn’t been clearly mentioned before, Kyoko finds names

significant, places particular importance on them. This isn't anything related to the supernatural; the idea of someone's true name having power is not grounded in anything in this setting. She just has strong personal feelings about calling people what they want to be called. This does show up in the narration, as well; since it's written from her perspective, if she's thinking of someone with a different name, there's a different name in the narration. Hopefully this doesn't become confusing; if you're uncertain of something, please let me know and I can adjust as needed.