

Hair Gel & Rocket Feet - Japan 2008

Contributed by Seymour Monkey
Sunday, 07 December 2008
Last Updated Monday, 08 June 2009

Statue of Astro Boy outside Kyoto station THE SEYMOUR MONKEY CHRONICLES:

Manga eyes watch me like Big Brother from billboards and video screens. Super cute soft toys plead from within Perspex puppy pounds. An idle machine explodes suddenly epileptic prompting gasps and giggles from first date couples snuggling in the photo booths. I walk off a bellyful of teriyaki whilst the amusement parlour orchestra plays Super Mario's eternal sonata.

I pause to satiate a thirst from an unexpectedly hot October day. After reviewing an array of coin-operated machines that stretch along the street like dryers at a Laundromat, I decide to try a local restaurant. The waitress waves me towards a menu machine in the corner. I play dinner roulette pressing buttons next to faded photos and sit back sipping a Kiran beer waiting for the lucky dip to arrive.

Outside on the street the night fashion begins to replace the collars and ties of the workday. A mash up of styles and eras. Girls skip by in stockings and boots straight out of a burlesque show, topped off with a cardigan that nanna could have given them for Xmas. Boys model Duran Duran hairstyles and eyeliner, sporting oversize designer handbags, gilded bags big enough to sneak a slab into the races. My head fills with yobbo arithmetic at the possibilities. I suspect though the contents to be hair mousse rather than Moosehead.

An alarm sounded. Harsh. Urgent. I looked up half expecting to see a U-Boat crash dive through the bitumen and escape through the Kobe sewers. A stern face in a blue uniform waved a fluorescent glow stick like a light sabre, channelling Jedi dreams or Samurai flash backs. The crowd stood chastened, like schoolboys outside a Head Master's office.

A mechanical door opened with a clatter of pistons and hydraulics. The office block sized vending machine had delivered a small Japanese 2-door hatchback to street level. A couple climbed in like movie stars and sped off into the night in a cloud of perfume and hairspray. Darth Vader melted back into the shadows and let us pass him by.