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Yokozuna and the Calling of Names That Aren't Our Own

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Abstract

It was the right ocean but the wrong island—instead of rising suns, there was the son of islanders: wild-eyed and wild-isled, grunting in place of words—every syllable guttural, every bark signifying a smash. The monster billed from Polynesia in hopes that we would ignore geography and the limiting stretch of triangles across Oceana and concentrate on him—thick-nosed and stoic—a body so wide it looked as if it touched both guardrails as he lumbered away from something much more majestic than where he was hailed from: a certainty where there should be mystery, a forgetful scooping together as if grabbing fistfuls of salt, as if you mistook the granules for sugar. Him, eating the dough anyway: shoveling the mush into his mouth despite claims of it tasting terrible, despite having no need for any of this. Him, eater of men, swallower of everything.

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Yokozuna and the Calling of Names That Aren't Our Own

An Essay by Brian Oliu

It was the right ocean but the wrong island—instead of rising suns, there was the son of islanders: wild-eyed and wild-isled, grunting in place of words—every syllable guttural, every bark signifying a smash. The monster billed from Polynesia in hopes that we would ignore geography and the limiting stretch of triangles across Oceana and concentrate on him—thick-nosed and stoic—a body so wide it looked as if it touched both guardrails as he lumbered away from something much more majestic than where he was hailed from: a certainty where there should be mystery, a forgetful scooping together as if grabbing fistfuls of salt, as if you mistook the granules for sugar. Him, eating the dough anyway: shoveling the mush into his mouth despite claims of it tasting terrible, despite having no need for any of this. Him, eater of men, swallower of everything.

The story goes that a wrestler tied a rope around his waist and dared any man to touch it—to come close enough to the man is to show some strength that cannot be found in the small: that your arms must be larger than legs, that there is something there that two hands cannot be wrapped around. The story continues: that he was the best—that other men had tried to move his mass, to send his swollen body out of the circle, to make anything but the soles of his feet touch sand.

It is my turn to tell you a story. I never wanted to be you, but I was you: the biggest kid you've ever seen, the one who all size was measured by. The champion of

taking up space: every chair a challenge, every bottom of a desk pressed up against the top of my thighs. I do not view chairs like you do: see how I spill out, see how I am captive by the confines of skin.

You did me no favors. You, silent as they come: let the skinny man speak for you, let the only noise be when you run—the wheeze of a man on his back. They called for a forklift when I hit the ground: that I could not lift myself up—that I would dare try to move this mass I created. They would push me to watch me teeter like a sad oak, that the momentum would send me spiraling, that if I could not control what I ate I could not control my entire body—that what rested in my stomach and on my tongue spoke for these legs, these knees.

There is a story about both of us: that if you cut us open—if one of those brown-eyed boys with elbows for days could pin either of us to the ground and take the knife across our chest, we would spill out gravy, we would leak chocolate syrup, that what would cascade out of our bodies and down our bellies would be anything but blood—anything that would make us seem anything like a human. They do not know how to prepare us because they do not eat anything: their mothers offering cupboards while they push noodles shaped like our tongues around their plate, each fork prong squeaking as it rubs against the porcelain, the remains on the dishware brushed off into the trashcan before loaded into the sink. They do not know to strangle us: to press their fingers into the softness of our neck, to push our chins up into our cheeks. You do this to keep our blood inside of us. You do this so you can crush us for once: to cut our arms from our shoulders, to spin the gold wheel, to press us like a dead duck, to have us gush marrow.

I will tell you a secret beyond the ones you know; the cane to the back, the death in the cameras. We all have our weaknesses, and here is mine—wipe the salt from your eyes & smear it on my skin until I grow thin, tough. My cheeks will shrivel to leather—I ask that if you are going to make me into nothing, I will be a nothing you cannot chew. Do this before I pin you down with my weight, before I will be more than you can ever carry. Here, it does not matter where I am from: there is no air in your chest that will allow you to say even the name of the smallest island. Save your breath: I am trying to give you back your sweetness.

Brian Oliu is originally from New Jersey & currently lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He is the author of *So You Know It's Me*, a series of Craigslist Missed Connections, *Level End*, a collection of lyric essays based on videogame boss battles, & the forthcoming *Leave Luck to Heaven*, an ode to 8-bit Nintendo Games. He is working on a series of essays about professional wrestlers.