

THE CORRESPONDENT

APPEAL
EXHIBITION FOR
HAITI EARTHQUAKE
VICTIMS



MEDIA
THE PUBLIC
DILEMMA FOR
PHOTOGRAPHERS

IN REVIEW
JOHN HERSHEY'S
HIROSHIMA, SIXTY
YEARS ON

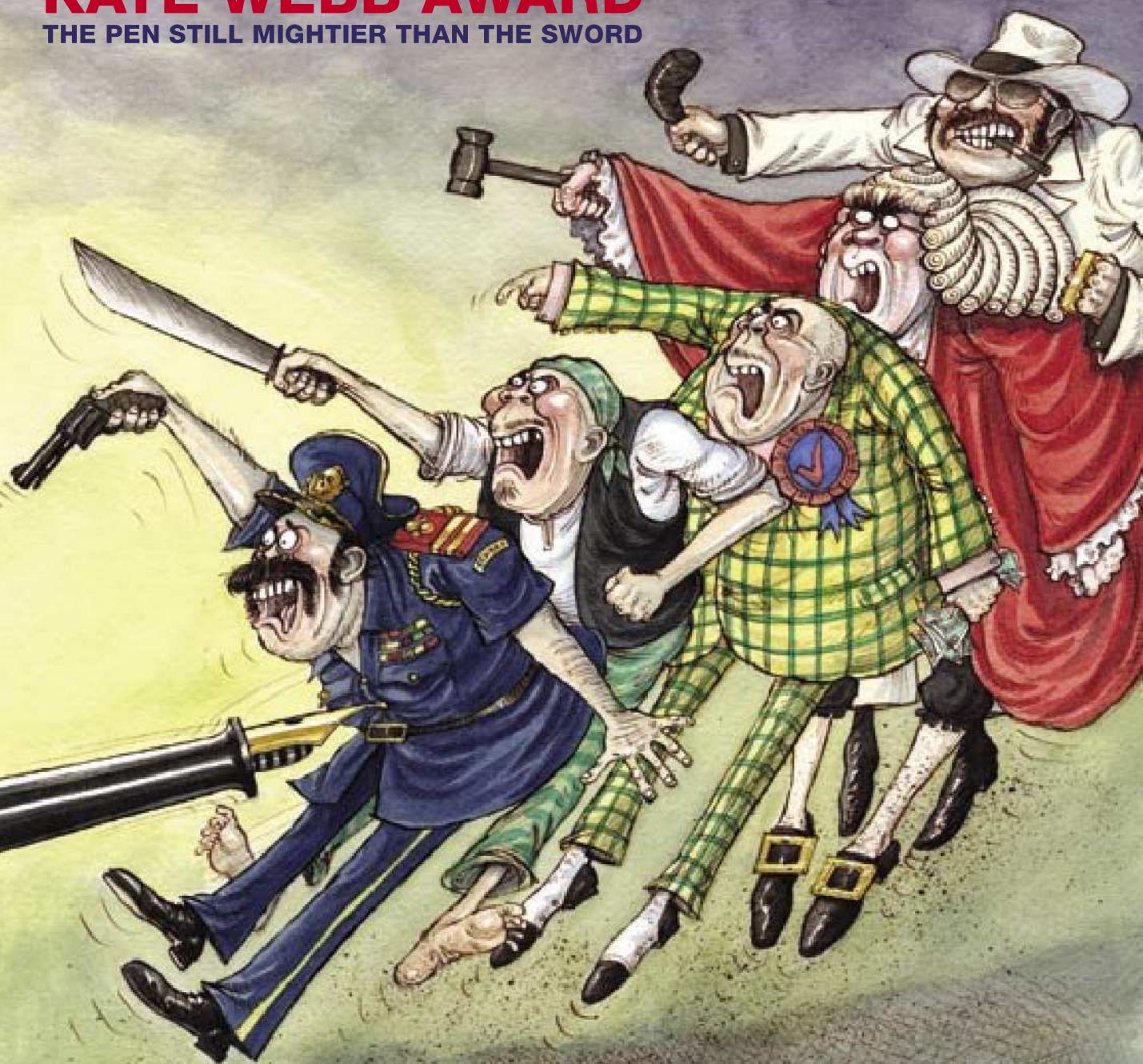


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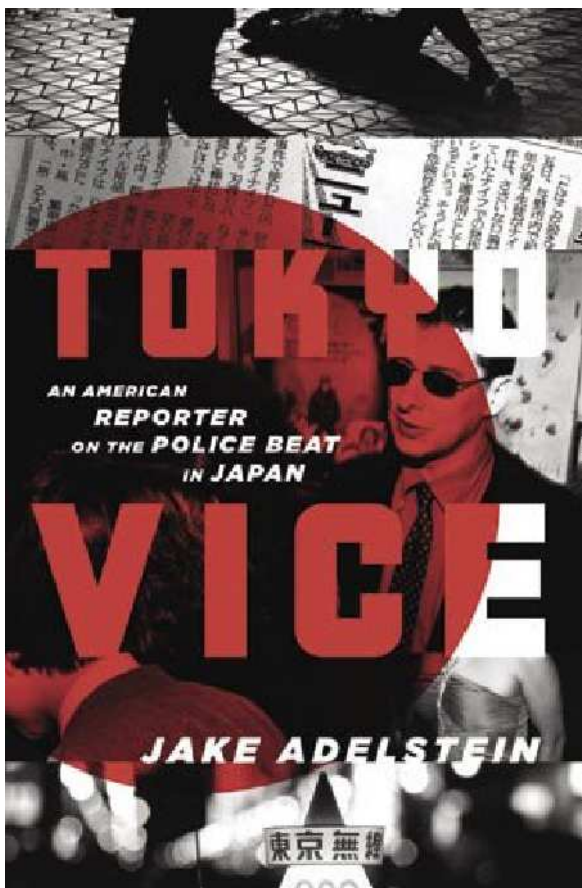
KATE WEBB AWARD

THE PEN STILL MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD



Tokyo vice, American eyes

When American Jake Adelstein worked as a crime reporter for Japan's largest newspaper, he was the first foreigner to do so. Now he's written a book about the experience. It's quite a read, writes **Christopher Dillon**.



Tokyo Vice: An American Reporter on the Police Beat in Japan
By Jake Adelstein
Published by Pantheon Books
ISBN: 978-0307378798

Tokyo Vice opens with a yakuza enforcer telling author Jake Adelstein that if he writes a story, Adelstein and possibly his family will be “erased”.

The story is that Tadamasa Goto, the head of a powerful Japanese criminal gang, received a liver transplant at the Dumont-UCLA Liver Cancer Center in the United States in the summer of 2001. In exchange for permission to enter the U.S., Goto is alleged to have sold-out other Japanese mobsters to the American authorities. If Adelstein prints his story, Goto will be executed.

Missouri native Adelstein learned about the transplant while working as a police reporter for the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Japan's largest daily newspaper. And that's where the story gets interesting.

Adelstein joined the *Yomiuri* from Tokyo's prestigious Sophia University, where he was studying comparative literature. After passing a comprehensive exam, in April 1993 he is assigned to the *Yomiuri*'s Urawa office. Adelstein calls Urawa, a bedroom community outside Tokyo, “the New Jersey of Japan”.

As a junior reporter, Adelstein works seven days a week. When he's not covering purse-snatchers and pickpockets, he and his fellow recruits are fetching dinner for senior employees, updating the office's scrapbooks, compiling sports scores and writing birth announcements for a local

community paper. Adelstein's early duties are dull, but his description of life in a Japanese newspaper provides numerous insights, ranging from publishers' political affiliations and the formula for writing news stories to the acceptable beverages (sake, shochu, beer and whisky) to drink with cops. Despite the constraints of press clubs — which Japan's government and corporations use to manage the domestic media and exclude foreign reporters and freelancers — Adelstein portrays a media environment that is diverse, vibrant and surprisingly competitive.

Writing and working in Japanese, Adelstein lives like a typical salary man. He often sleeps in a cot at the office, doesn't go home for days and puts his job above all else.

Along the way, he develops relationships with several police officers, including Detective Chiaki Sekiguchi, who becomes a confidant and mentor. Befriending police officers is an essential skill for crime reporters in Japan, who are expected to show up at the officers' homes at night and on weekends with gifts. In return, the police provide information that reporters hope they can turn into a scoop.

Through these relationships and his day-to-day reporting, Adelstein gains an insider's knowledge of the yakuza, its factions, culture, history and business interests. He also explains Japan's vice laws and the contradictions of Japanese sexual

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morality, where the display of public hair and plain-vanilla prostitution are forbidden but nearly anything else is acceptable.

A phone call from Helena, an Australian whom Adelstein met while researching the disappearance of British hostess Lucie Blackman, introduces Adelstein to Japan's human-trafficking business. Helena wants Adelstein to write about the women at the club where she works, who are lured to Japan from Poland, Estonia and Russia with promises of high-paying hostess jobs. When the women arrive in Japan, their passports are

confiscated and they are forced to work as prostitutes. Due to Japan's strict immigration laws, women who complain to the police are deported.

In addition to reporting on the sex industry, Adelstein becomes a minor participant when he spends an evening working as a male escort in a host club that caters to wealthy women. Like hostess bars for men, host clubs fill a need for companionship and attention that Adelstein describes as “virtual love”.

This is not a self-congratulatory memoir. Adelstein is blunt about his shortcomings and the mistakes he makes in his relationships with sources, particularly Helena. “It hit me like a punch in the gut: the realization that I'd endangered every person I cared about, liked, loved or simply knew,” he says.

The book covers nearly 17 years, including multiple postings with the *Yomiuri*. That span, and the number of colleagues, cops and criminals it covers, means the book could have benefited from the addition of a dramatis personæ. But that is a minor fault.

And the death threat that opens the book? Adelstein agrees not to write the story for the *Yomiuri*, which satisfies the yakuza enforcer. *The Washington Post* ran the story on May 11, 2008, and it was subsequently picked up by the Japanese press. Adelstein now hopes to find a company that is brave enough to publish a sanitized, Japanese edition of *Tokyo Vice*.