

Remembering *The OA* in Prague

Wouldn't you like to know why August 23rd, 2019 is the best day of my life? If we trust in our calendars, then it may also have been the longest. I remember the first moment of it: I was standing in front of a notable clocktower in Prague as it rang midnight. What arrested me wasn't the architecture of the tower nor the fantasy mechanism mounted on its face but the ogling crowd gathered around the civilian timepiece, paying attention as it gives us the new day.

Woosh.

Now, where was I coming from and where was I going? I had just excused myself from a Couchsurfing meetup at a bar. I had been traveling through Europe for two months and it was the last time I was around people, a phrase which raises the tide in my eye sockets. I was meeting so many people for the first time: a time stuck to the hourglass right at its point of inflection. It was end times, yet everyone I was speaking to at the meetup was in Prague for long enough beyond that night to make plans with one another (*let's grab a coffee tomorrow!*).

A Brazilian guy I met was biking across Europe north to south and had just arrived in Prague that very day. Another girl was from Mexico, but had been living in Paris for many years doing something either quite banal or nonchalantly artful. There were Czech folk there too, for whom I spit out my mouthful of Czech words and expressions I had collected that day. They told me my pronunciation was not terrible. Neither the boy nor the girl was all that enamored with Prague. They cautioned themselves of the city, and when I proffered Czechia as a moniker for their country, the boy and girl's facial retorts and eighth-hearted remarks were signs that I had obviously misspoken and should forever

use 'the Czech Republic' when referring to the nation. There was a handsome young Czech whose smile was so friendly it kept drawing me physically closer to him, even though we were already plenty close to be heard amidst the bar din. There was a girl from Indonesia, the first far-away place I had ever traveled to four years prior. There was a pair of German coworkers: one hellbent on stirring up romantic troubles, the other gung-ho on terminating them.

And me? I was a transient whose backpack was stashed in a back room, waiting for the itch to set me off for the last time and begin my trek to the airport, and I do mean *trek*. A walk is always free, and I had just spent my last crowns on the beer I was sharing with people I didn't know and would likely never meet again (but you never know!). I wanted to keep being this limitless person forever embracing and recontextualizing the present, just like OA. All along my journey, it felt like I had met the world when it most wanted me.

The O_____ A_____. Earlier that year, I ditched school, work and fucks and drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco to attend the premiere screening of the first chapter of Part II of my favorite Netflix series. At the Castro Theater, full of OA fans, I got to watch the beginning of the next phase of a story I deemed more worth telling than my own. Which, now, do you think is worth continuing?

I left them all at the Couchsurfing event and began following GoogleMaps' personalized itinerary to Praha Airport: an approximately four and a half hour walk from the bar. I recalibrated my body for steady muling and began my final trial.

I had never walked so much in my life as I did in Europe. I found the obtuse path GoogleMaps had forged for me peculiar yet appropriate for my conceit. Europe wasn't finished with me; it had one last chance to say to me what it had always been saying: *here you are*.

An hour in, I was walking at a brisk pace through a Czech suburb when the map's directions steered me into a forest. I didn't hesitate. Before I knew it I was on a sylvan path at 2:00 am. Maybe I would have shined a light, but I needed to conserve my phone's battery which stored my audacious map. I decided that a flashlight would have sapped my vision more than the dark on its own; I intuited this from my eyes slowly adjusting to the shadowscape.

The dark swarmed me, but it crumbled signs not to worry like a benevolent human breaking up bread to feed geese. Benches benchmarked the way and reassured me that it was safe; that I was not entirely doomed; that my feet were wise enough to the continent at this point; that I am unmistakably the person who doesn't think twice when led to an unlit patch on the journey. I felt valiant color walking the woodland route. If passing through the forest was the way to the airport, then who was I to stick to the streets? This was no time to mess around—I had a flight to catch.

I wish I could saunter through that forest again in daylight hours. Twice I had to switch trails, but finding the right trails to do so wasn't straightforward. The first instance was precisely where it appeared on the map, and I forged deeper and downward onto the forest floor. Walking alongside a soft, trickling stream, I was not aware I had to switch trails a second time until I reached a dead end. *This can't be it.* I lit up the forest with my phone's 2% battery light, just long enough to see a jut veering up through the woods. As I made my way upward there was yet another bifurcation. The alternate path, the one I was *not* supposed to follow, appeared eerily like a mountain trail of my hometown. A temptation. *Touché, forest.*

I resisted, and 10 minutes later my 1% phone battery (GoogleMaps was rationing its breaths at this point) led me out of the woods onto a rural Prague cul-de-sac. The street wove out to a two-lane boulevard, where an ominous, electrically fuzzy town replete with farmhouses and television static struck me as more remote than a city usually allows.

I traveled along the boulevard with only an occasional glance at my petering map. Within a span of 30 minutes, I came to a plain, an anti-forest, a clear black sky. This change of shading excited me and I picked up momentum. Before I knew it, I was power walking down the strip whistling the opening credits theme from Part II of *The OA*.

The theme in question plays over an extraordinary sequence. It gives the viewer an overview of the Earth, the eye rocketing out of bounds until we land in San Francisco, the setting of Part II and the place I was first moved by this cinema. Throughout my journey, I held onto *The OA*—a story about multiple dimensions and the possibilities of essence and interconnectedness - like a trusted compass. The series' ethos blended well with an adventure of this caliber, and so I walked the highway with the leitmotif as my tailwind.

The moment struck me as another one of those times when I would have willingly been abducted by aliens. In my heart I knew the journey was close to over, but that did nothing to restrain my desire for the lore to survive its end. It was during a train voyage from Florence to Pracchia that I found out *The OA* would not be renewed for any of its subsequent parts (the creators had conceived *five*). It was the most devastating news I had received that year, but in those moments on the boulevard I had felt resurrected by the story and its potential. Somehow, the show's cancellation had augmented my draw to the unknown, so that once again an alien abduction would not only be welcome but well-timed. Force me into something more exciting than *the end*, why don't you?

That was not their choice though, and after a series of sharp turns I rejoined the Prague suburbs. Google Maps nudged me onto a dirt road toward more ghostly farmhouses wantonly buzzing and zapping. To my right there was a sea vessel beached on the bank of a tired stream. Why such a large boat was adjacent to so little water was nothing short of odd, but I didn't have any time to poke holes in the environment's impracticalities. I crossed paths with a black cat and the road became

darker – the kind that behooves stargazing. My map informed me I was only 15 minutes away from the airport, but the surroundings bewildered this assertion – how *could* I be so close to an international airport but still feel so entrenched in the relics of an unknown location? Bend by bend, the houses became fewer and the road more deserted, but there were lights ahead. From what I could see on the horizon, it was another highway.

I reached the final juncture: a full-service gas station, the kind suited for the heaviest machinery to fill up. My adrenaline must have faded a bit under those lights, shot down with fluorescence. I could see planes hovering close to earth, flying the upwind or floating down. GoogleMaps, in all its mischief, pointed me to a dirt road this late in the chapter, but I wasn't able to go very far down it. There was a menacing gate staked with pylons and an authoritative truck idling in front. I knew I was being steered somewhere unbecoming of air travelers but I walked up to the gate anyway to face the folly.

The two men in the truck were in uniform and asked me in Czech what I was doing. I told them I didn't speak Czech and I was looking for the airport. They understood enough and made large sweeping motions with their hands that signaled I was approaching the airport from the wrong end. I realized finally that GoogleMaps had led me to the airport from behind, to *walk the runway*. I had been backpacking for hours across a mirth of landscapes, and in the final stretch to the terminal entrance, I trudged with decrepit shoes over watered grass growing in airport roundabouts. My ankles were tickled and my face was sore, my back regretting and remembering this lumbering posture. *Can't you ever stand up straight?*

I like to imagine that for all the walking I did crammed into two months on the European landmass, I did stand up straight. I like to imagine that during that time my eyes were not as murky as they are daily. I like to imagine that I was worn but not weary, that my adventurer's spirit still smelled of Balinese rice paddies, that new scents accompanied me in a

cocktail of European aromas. I was still sweaty—I will always be. I stepped into the air-conditioned terminal, shed my luggage, and ate pretzels tirelessly.

I landed at LAX on August 23rd, 2019 at 2:45pm. My friend picked me up from the airport and drove us through Los Angeles to Netflix Headquarters. We parked Eva, her sky blue Prius, around the corner and quickly drew up signs with black Sharpie. *We believe in the OA! Save the OA!* We approached the front of the building and joined two other protesters in the fight to rescue the show from late capitalism. Cars honked at us in solidarity, and one of the girls wore lavender angel wings. I heard the OA theme in the background, but when I looked around there was no one whistling. Maybe someone had crossed into this dimension to tell me that the story isn't finished yet. And did I believe it?