

## Excerpt From The Wonders Of Cata

by Nick Cody

*“I’ve never been with a 10, but one night I porked five TWOs!”*

George Carlin, comedian

I am reliable. That’s probably the reason why I got this job in the first place. When the agency in Cata called my last employer, The Light Way Language Academy in Taiwan, they didn’t want to interview me and they spent a grand total of ten seconds on the phone asking the *receptionist* about me: “What were the results of his drug test?” and “How many days has he called in sick?”

The oddity of it doubles and even triples when you consider the fourteen-page job application they had sent me when I applied. It required handwritten replies only. Questions ranged from, “What’s Your Favorite Movie?” to “How Do You Feel About Scorpions?” But the salary was a grotesque figure that would easily triple and nearly quadruple my current modest income. So I answered every question, dotted every i and double crossed every t (personal flare), and whammo! there I was, bound for Cata. I guess the few indiscretions I had had were compensated for by my perfect work attendance. So long Light Way! You won’t have Dick Covey to kick around anymore.

Having mentioned the handsome remuneration, I should now in the interest of full disclosure admit that the job applicant harbored a more secretive reason for pursuing employment in Cata. Surprise, surprise, it had nothing to do with the job profile (weekly contract hours: 9; paid vacation: 18 weeks) or money. Everybody knows about the number of hits the phrase “Catian Women” gets on BlueTube. Furthermore, everybody knows that you don’t see much skin. Despite having only a handful of authentic videos uploaded, the number of total hits that tag amassed last year easily jettied it up the ranks to surpass the long-time leader, “California Girls,” which has over a zillion different models, uploaders, and videos.

The videos of Catian Women, on the other hand, come NOT ONLY from a single uploader, member name “Catian Uploader” (you can’t make this stuff up!), but also from a single year. The last I heard, before I moved to Taipei to join The Light Way, the account was disabled. I guess the government found out and put the kibosh on it. By government, I mean the Catian Counsel, and not the obese oligarchs in Washington, D.C.

The videos. The longest one is less than ten seconds, and all of them restrict themselves to a female profile extending from hips to ear lobes. No eyes, nose, knees or toes. The 4-second clip with 1,568,786,011 hits opens with a slightly concave navel set into a slender, though not muscular, pale waist and pans down slowly to reveal a plush mass of ebony pubic hair. The video with a slightly higher number of hits has a duration twice as long and pans upward from the ribs along a female figure who, according to the shadow cast on the granite tile floor, seems to be doing up her hair into a bun or pony tail. That shadowy pose, with elbows extended outwards, suggests the angelic form of wings, but the image’s figurative lure is nothing compared to the literal allure it casts in its final dazzling frame: a supple breast crowned with an

implausibly large and long nipple tilting slightly though clearly *upwards*! Finally, the highest ranking clip clocks in at a mere two seconds. In number of hits, it surpasses the others by an order of magnitude. In it, one can make out the lobe of a human ear, the slender form of a neck draped with a few dark strands of hair, and an odd figure etched onto the skin, resembling the tattoo of a turtle with a long tail. Not being large, a US quarter dollar coin could have covered it. Personally, my first thought was, “An amarillo?” A second or third viewing makes clear that it is not an animal at all, but a number. Yessir, a stylized *nine* scrawled on human skin had over 10 billion hits on BlueTube before it was shut down.

None of that would make any sense without some knowledge of Cata. And I know that anyone reading these notes is here for Cata, not trivia on BlueTube hits. Now that I am deep into my one-year contract here, I’m in a perfect place to shed some light on this geographical oddity. Except for one problem. Now that I’m here, I am no longer interested in writing about it. And it seems foolish at best, and presumptuous at worst, to spend precious time scribbling notes for posterity when 1) the door to Happy Place will soon slam in my face forever!, and 2) the world, literary and otherwise, will not likely survive long enough for me to write something worthwhile, for the thing to get published, and for readers to read it.

Therefore, I beg your pardon if I blaze too swiftly through these tidbits on Cata in order to reach the juicy parts. The following notes, I hope, won’t prove to be woefully inadequate. First, name and location. Not to be confused with Qatar (oil emirate) or Kada, the sub-Saharan republic which claimed the number one spot in worldwide rankings for longevity and lowest infant mortality rate for twenty consecutive years, Cata is a landlocked city-state nestled into the northern Himalayas. Hailed as the “Luxembourg of Asia”, Cata achieved independence from China nearly 40 years ago and has dazzled travel writers ever since. Shrouded in mystery and Himalayan mist, its mystique has not been dispelled despite being featured in *Conde Nast*, *World Traveler*, and *WTF*. On the contrary, these exposes only served to whet the appetite of curious readers. Critics and subscribers immediately commented that almost all of the photos from the three magazines were identical, leading some to believe that they were government file pieces merely released to the magazine crews. The presumption was false. It is true however that all three magazine photo journalists who were working at different stints on different occasions were permitted to take photos only from the same pre-approved spots.

I have been informed by reliable sources that Cata derives from two Chinese characters which when paired mean “kitty litter”. Not that its citizenry have much use for Mandarin nowadays. Mandarin Chinese is only used during the satirical performances of its thriving theater scene. And the subject of their satires, the butt of most of their jokes, is China. The official language of the state is English, declared so by the Cata Interim Government in the weeks immediately following its bid for independence and thereafter ratified in its constitution. Meant initially as a snub to the power elite of the CPC in Beijing, the transfer to English from Mandarin Chinese took hold with some obvious growing pains developing along the way.

Cata boasts a subway system like no other. There are, however, only two lines. One line circumscribes the city, running in a complete circle along Cata’s perimeter. The Black Line, which connects with the White Line at two points, serves mostly to transport workers to their homes on the city outskirts. Upon first hearing it, Catians giggled at the American idiom, “from the wrong side of the tracks,” and quickly adopted it for their own. The other line runs East to West (and vice versa) through the business districts in a curving wave that connects opposite poles of the circle. The very few tourists who are allowed into the country—photo-journalists, diplomats, or otherwise—present a blank smile when they see the subway map because it

resembles, no “resembles” is the wrong word because it connotes an approximation, whereas in this case the two subway lines of Cata form an *exact* Yin-Yang.

I take Yin to get home and Yang to get to the red light district. In my first few months, I was an eager beaver (another American idiom that Catians borrowed, kept, and now regularly employ), exploring the multitude of tiny milk bars, juicy spots, and dance clubs which all had two things in common: first, none were much larger than twice the area of a prison cell; and second, the women were peerless and one hundred percent Catian.

Sounding like the noob that I was in my first few weeks, I once asked a bartender serving me a tall glass of pineapple juice at this place called Ma Gu why there weren't any female customers in the bars or clubs around here. She rolled her eyes, not once but twice! The first time was to show her initial reaction to such a stupid question, and the second time to reinforce her consternation after she recognized that most foreign of verbal plays, sarcasm. “They are probably across town,” she said. And then after what I felt was an awkward silence, when I asked what's over there, she didn't even bother to roll her eyes. She glanced down her nose at a row of perfectly manicured and perfectly pink fingernails and said, “The *other* red light district.”

Some people, those of us who were born on the “wrong side of the tracks”, might assume the Catians were arrogant, condescending, or worse based on the stories that are out there. Take the anecdote about the British ambassador who was meeting his Catian counterpart at an official state dinner in Beijing. As it was reported in WTF Magazine, the Brit had been angling all night for his chance to meet the black-and-silver clad Ms. Kooning, whose slim waist, clearly visible navel, and ample posterior had been drawing stares and generating whispers (which were a mix of awe-struck appreciation and seething resentment) all night long, according to plan.

Their encounter was brief. The drooling English diplomat, grinning under a sapphire chandelier and momentarily crowned with a glimmering star of refracted light from his bald pate, lavished praise for the wonders of Cata to its ambassador. Ms. Kooning listened with patience to his long list of superlatives and then extended a hand in gratitude. When she heard, repeated for the second time, his country of origin, she bowed in gratitude and then, before she took her leave, said within earshot of the eavesdroppers, “Your navy is superior to ours.”

Despite such stories, I never felt like the Catians were very snobbish or condescending. They might be towards each other, but not particularly towards me or other foreigners, as best as I could tell. But maybe I had just become used to people's condescension in general growing up in the States. When you work in Education, rather than one of the three Gloms (Fossil, InfoTech, or Defense), there is no shortage of snobbery sent your way. Besides, about six months into my year, I began to receive proof that Catian women don't discriminate on the basis of race as I became involved in a series of fabulous flings. Gender is another matter, but I'll save those observations for another time.

Now is a good opportunity to recount the evening when I had the chance to spend a night with a Level 7. On one of those rare nights when I wasn't hanging out in the Zone, I was approached at the hotel bar by a diminutive woman in her late 40's who could have passed for 22 in the States. A contrast of alabaster skin and pitch black everything else (except her mauve lips), she entered the front door flanked by two bodyguards and walked straight towards me. Her bodyguards, some of you might get this reference, were unmistakably twins who also unmistakably resembled Bruce Lee. For all I know, they might actually have *been* Bruce Lee considering the advancements in genetic mapping, human genome science, and the stealth of Catian agents. All it would take nowadays is a smidgeon of the master's remains, taken perhaps from a museum or a cemetery. A little genetic tidbit of the ancestor here, a shake in the test tube

over there, and presto! a being with identical DNA is sucking on the end of a laboratory teat. In this case, it looks like they made two.

If the perfection of genome science can chart human virility on to a 10-point scale, you better believe they can crank out a couple of Bruce Lees. Dual kung-fu masters in the service of a high mistress—it's just one of the many wonders of Cata.

By the way, I knew her age because the second or third sentence she said to me was, "I'm in my late 40's, is it acceptable to you?" And as she said this she turned her gaze upon me, with the swivel of her head resulting in a wave of motion to pulse through her long dark mane and reveal for a split second on her neck, close to her pale ear lobe, the number seven.

Trying not to stammer, I said, "I'm thirty-three."

"Age is just a number," was her reply.

My mind was racing through strategies, tactics, one-liners, compliments, even some backhanded compliments meant to throw a little insecurity into the mix, advice from pros, postures, power poses, and echoing with the heated whispers of libidinal craving. When I was afforded a brief glance at her body as she ordered a drink, I quickly turned back and directed an unspoken question to the shot glass placed in front of me, "Jesus Christ, is she wearing any underwear?" Wearing a kind of dark, semi see-through gauze is a favorite fashion statement among high-class Catian women.

Compliments, backhanded or otherwise, would serve little purpose here, in this bar and in this country. The best way to seal the deal, I trusted, was through the judicious use of silence. Furthermore, I knew the Dos and Don'ts. But even though I was far enough along in my year to know better, I was about to commit one of the biggest gaffes of my career. Right up there with no flirting and no farting is the Cardinal Sin. It's become proverbial: No man who ever bedded a Catian 4 (or higher) laughed beforehand.

Giggles, snorts, guffaws, etc. are all seen as the crassest of turn-offs. The bigger the laugh, the worse the offense, and in those cases where the comic outburst is something too big for the offender to disguise as a sneeze or a cough, then you've got no hope.

She did most of the talking, which wasn't much. Besides telling me her age, she also disclosed a couple of surprising facts. Not only did she reside in the penthouse suite, she owned the whole damned hotel! And tucked away in a secret drawer of her nightstand was a whole roll of pills reserved for special occasions. She didn't have to tell me the type, since narcotics went out of fashion decades ago, because I knew that she was talking about a substance designed and manufactured in Cata which acts as a high-grade aphrodisiac called Placebo. Whether or not it was intended as some kind of joke, that's the *real* name of a *really* powerful pill.

Finally, my curiosity got the better of me. I had to know why I had been chosen, why I was so lucky. After all, I had been in Cata for half a year, pining and wining and dining and all I had to show for it was a decimated bankbook and a tube of Plan B lube next to my PC.

Then she told me. "There are cameras in the restrooms. In fact, in every stall and urinal."

I think I said something like, "Geez."

She slammed her shot of grapefruitade and turned toward the private elevator at the back of the bar, extending her hand back to me, saying: "Come with me to my suite. I have an eager beaver."

And that was that. So close!