

Aquarium of Worries



Cabo Pulmo, Mexico

It is August of 2013 and she is in Mexico. It is only one week into the vacation, yet every possible scenario, likely or unlikely, is already circling her mind like a bunch of vultures over a dying animal. This poor animal, a banal metaphor for her happiness, tried so hard to live a happy life, but upon brief separation from the pack, it wore itself out trying to catch up, and soon collapsed out of exhaustion and laid there waiting to die. She wished that the stretches of anxiety-free happiness could just keep up with the pack and graze from pasture to pasture. If there was ever a predator waiting to pounce on the weakest animal, she always obliged. Not without a battle of course, but she wondered if giving up might instead be less exhausting. She wondered whether not keeping up with the pack was an option. Whether on land or sea, there was always danger looming in paradise. It was so tiring to stay happy.

Outside the hotel room, a beautiful full moon lit the sky and the entire bay of Costa Azul. Other than the scorching daytime

heat, there was no better time to be on vacation. There were no thunderstorms. It was less humid than she expected. The water was potable everywhere. She hadn't gotten sick from 'la turista'. She hadn't seen or heard a snake anywhere and only two people had tried to pitch a timeshare to her thus far. To any other person, a cheap vacation by the water with someone you love should be heaven on earth. It was heaven on earth. But it was also hell, because none of the big things back home were resolved and thus every little setback in heaven was a constant reminder of hell.

At night, she closed her eyes and craved to be underwater, where everything was quiet and she could explore. Yet in the shadows, even in her sleep, she saw predators and screamed quietly. Haunted by fear, she would get up and urinate, sometimes half a dozen times, wasting salt and overheating, waking up exhausted and hopeless. All of her worries from home, a trifecta of debt, work and family, disguised themselves as sharks and snuck up on her in her real and imagined snorkeling activities. At daytime, she was snorkeling in the magnificent Sea of Cortez, which Jacques Cousteau himself dubbed the "aquarium of the world". Her boyfriend held her hand when they went into the deep waters, but at the sight of deep ridges, she pulled him back. Her body shivered underwater while she wondered what might confront her on the other side. She swam back to shore swiftly after getting tired of being afraid.

Tomorrow they would drive to Cabo Pulmo, a most spectacular place for snorkeling and diving. In her sleep, she imagined what it might be like to encounter a whale shark. She imagined that moment when her boyfriend would pull her toward the deep waters in pursuit of the gentle giant. She visualized the dark shadow of facing an unknown creature the size of a small bus, hoping that it would be spotted so that she would know immediately that it is not a foe. She felt the panic that would overcome her body. She wondered if the creature would

sense her overwhelming anxiety and try to save her by swallowing her whole. The odds of being swallowed by a whale shark are pretty slim. It almost happened to someone last year. Their throat is too small however to fit a full person. If a giant fish could not save her from her lifetime anxiety, maybe she could never be saved. The Sea of Cortez was no match for her imagination, an aquarium of worries, where hundreds of species coexist and thrive with little hope for extinction.

Huacas of the Past

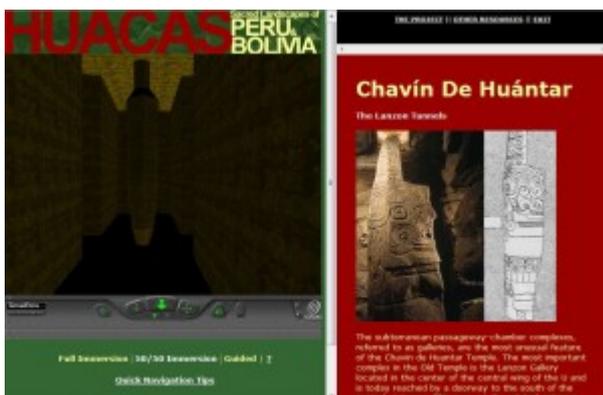
While searching for inspiration to move forward, sometimes it helps to look back...way back. Over dinner tonight, James and I talked about old civilizations. I remembered that I had an old tribute to a certain place of the past, a sacred place: my own [huaca](#).

Before game engines were available to mere mortals, there were things like CAVElib and Performer. I made my first CAVElib application to look like a mythical place in Peru. I would just sit in the CAVE and stare at it. It sounds dorky, but I really liked escaping in it. It was scaled to size and I felt like maybe I was lost in the fog in the Andes. Somewhere in my archives, I may have some old screen captures from IRIX. A few months ago, I even found a printout of the entire code for that application written in C and OpenGL. I was a primitive programmer, but somehow I made it happen. But it was not enough.

I was sad that I couldn't go to that place, neither physically nor virtually. VRML offered a glimpse of what the future may be. It was a way to bring real-time graphics to the web. It was a dream. It sucked. Because programming for VRML sucked.

In 2001, I made a virtual *Chavin De Huantar*. Today, you would call it level design for a game. There is even a dangerous *easter egg* hidden somewhere in the levels. I wrote my first published student paper about it. I was terrified to present it. I met some nice people. But it went nowhere. Too far ahead of its time, for better or worse. Cosmoplayer, the VRML player died, but thankfully it can be downloaded and installed even on Firefox. I downloaded and installed it today. And much to my surprise, most of the world works. Maybe one day, I can get to Chavin, shoot high rez pictures and make a real video game out of it in Unity.

For now, all that remains can be viewed below—a virtual ruin of my past ☐



<http://www.evl.uic.edu/gotsis/huacas/>
(requires VRML Player download from [here](#))