

## BARBARIAN PHASE

HEDLEY TWIDLE

THIRTY-SIX IS no longer young, promising, or even emerging. It's one year too late to be a member of the Youth League and twenty years too late to start surfing, especially in the wild and freezing waters around Cape Town.

All that lost time weighs on us, Alex and me, as we watch teenagers or outright children paddle onto some heaving Atlantic swell, make the drop, carve some shapes along the blue-green wall, and then kick out like it was the easiest thing in the world.

'Poets,' he would say, beard in hand, as we watched from a car park in the depths of winter, when the swells come in, 'There are poets among us.'

Alex and I both have beards that are beginning to go silver, but I am average height and skinny while he is tall and rangy, muscular. We are both only children, sort of, both loners who like having someone to play with, now and then. We both have outlandish surnames that nobody can spell or pronounce.

After sessions which had gone more than usually badly – when we had fluffed a take-off in front of Coach, or our boards had gone vaulting over the white water, or (worst of all) we had pretended to paddle and miss a wave when in fact we were too chicken to actually take it – Alex could be less philosophical:

'All those years, doing what? Jerking off in Constantia. When I could've been at Long Beach in fifteen minutes.'

His new cold-water hood made him look somehow Nordic, Icelandic. Hooded, bearded, grizzled: he looked, I guess, better than he was. Out in the backline he seemed to get the kind of respect I never do. He looked like the kind of Kommetjie big-wave surfer who might get towed onto a moving hillside of ocean out by Dungeons, and then talk about the experience in monosyllables: 'It's a team effort out there, I rely on my guys.'

But the fact is we were struggling to deal with a mushy two-foot shorebreak off the Milnerton light-house car park, where the water tasted of phosphates and Alex had at one point emerged trailing a nappy

from his leash. And this gap was getting to him, to us: the gap between our surfing aspirations and abilities. Between the utter sublimity of what we were seeing – up close at the Gat or the Hoek; online in YouTube clips: Nazaré, Mullaghmore, the endlessly spooling GoPro barrels of Skeleton Bay – and the prolonged humbling that the middle-aged kook (beginner) must endure.

When we were younger, Alex did a school exchange and as a result still holds the Scottish under-sixteen record for high jump. Many of us remember how he would sail over that bar in a state of grace. That strange, floating, corkscrewing motion was not only physically impossible for me, I also didn't have the vaguest notion of how it might or could feel in the body: it was literally unimaginable. He played club football in Cape Town for many years with great focus, forbidding anyone he knew to come and watch him. He venerates the one-time midfielder Zinedine Zidane and in fact looks a bit like him: craggy and intense. His mother is suffering from Alzheimer's, as my mother once did: something we have discussed far out to sea in a world of grey glass and mist, or in a howling blue offshore that whips our words away as soon as they are spoken. The only memory that his mother has left of me is school sports days, when all those who didn't qualify for anything else were placed in a 1,500-metre race at the end of the day, a sort of hold-all charity event.

'And I remember how he used to *wa-a-a-a-a-ve* when he went past!'

This is what she would say; and he liked to bring it out, since a bit of good-natured ribbing and emotional abuse is a key component of long-standing male friendships.

'With a big grin on his face, so happy! *W-a-a-a-a-ving* to the crowd.'

My only claim to sporting prowess was a brief period in which my tennis was good enough, or infuriating enough, to earn me the nickname 'The Wall'. And this difference between Alex and myself – not just in athletic ability, but also sporting



SURFERS' CORNER,  
MUIZENBERG, CAPE  
TOWN. IMAGE COURTESY  
OF THE AUTHOR.

philosophy – has played out in various ways during our surf career to date. He wants grandeur, the Romantic sublime, feats of perfection and beauty. He has known them in his youth, and so expects them, hopes for them again. Any success for me would come, if at all, via attrition and doggedness. But mostly it was undiluted humiliation out there: being whistled off a wave by a seven-year-old, or chucking your board and diving for the bottom as the next set rumbles in near the Koeberg nuclear plant, on a day when no one else is in the water and your car window's already been smashed, when you start hyperventilating to get enough air into your system ahead of what you know is coming: the slow underwater somersaults and icy pirouettes of a long, glorious Atlantic hold down.

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'Five years,' said Alex, who had been googling, 'Five years to get to a decent level. If —', and this was the kicker, 'You surf every day.'

Coach believed there was still time for us. He grew up near Vic Bay, one of the most reliable point breaks in the country: endless afternoons of peeling rights. What one needed to learn, he said, was a consistent wave without too many changing variables. One needed the closest natural equivalent to Kelly Slater's wave pool in California, recently constructed and consistently delivering identical, mud-coloured inland tubes in front of all the Budweiser stalls and corporate boxes. Working with chaos mathematicians, the ex-world champion had engineered the surf equivalent of cracking the human genome: truly we were living in the end times.

Coach's build was compact and muscular. He had that mystical quantum of extra time afforded the athlete. When catching a wave (seemingly without paddling — he was always at the right peak at the right time) he would do a sort of mini cobra pose, a half-press-up, looking left and right before deciding whether to pop up. If yes, it was already done, and he was now moving along the face, describing thoughtful

curves, his gaze far ahead and down the line. One hand a little raised, perhaps, as if to say (to both the ocean and the mammals sporting in its cooking swells): let's keep it tidy folks, let's not get too carried away.

Though ten years younger than us, Coach brought great emotional intelligence to bear in the role of surf mentor. Never too quick to praise nor to blame, he was a master of understatement (to Alex's annoyance he would never specify how big a swell was in figures), and a paragon of backline etiquette. On his own time he mainly surfed the feral, kelpy breaks near Cape Point. Snorkelling once in those parts had been enough for me. As I dropped from a rock ledge down through water so planktonic and full of nutrients that it was almost soupy, I had a strong bodily sense that something was near, was aware of me.

Coach downplayed such dangers, of course, and said these breaks were the only places left where surfers had any manners. But for a year or so, right at the start, he graciously accompanied us to wherever the wind was offshore.

The on/offshore question is the fundamental binary of surfing, it determines everything. Onshore winds (blowing from sea to land) are pure evil: they mush and mangle the swell, breaking ranks, knocking waves on the back of the head, spilling them over themselves into a grey-brown mush. Offshore winds (blowing from land to sea) are godly: they comb the swell into stately lines, with spray pluming behind, walls going green and barrels hollow. Offshore winds 'wreath the waves in glory', writes William Finnegan in *Barbarian Days*: 'They groom them, hold them up and prevent them from breaking for a crucial extra beat ... On a good day, their sculptor's blade, meticulous and invisible, seems to drench whole coastlines in grace.' His epic memoir of a surfing life ranges from the warm-water tubes of Hawaii and Bali to the cold-water bombs of San Francisco and Madeira. And since the author spent some time teaching at a 'Coloured' (ie 'mixed-race') school in Grassy Park during the 1980s, the book even touches on Surfers' Corner at nearby Muizenberg, the city's nursery for beginners. Vaguely embarrassed even to be thinking about waves at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle, Finnegan quickly dispenses with it as 'a wide, shapeless beach break' which he surfed when not too busy grading papers or planning lessons. It stung a little, seeing a patch of ocean where I'd spent so much time reduced to those four words.

Because Cape Town is at the head of a coastal peninsula, you can, in theory, always find a break where the wind is offshore. If the summer south-easter is turning False Bay into a pewter-coloured, foaming algal mess, it will be producing crystalline A-frames on the other side at Dunes or Llandudno. If the winter north-wester has reduced Glen Beach and Off the Wall to a disgusting slop of storm water and sewage blowback, then Muizenberg will finally be coming into its own. Pulled over near the Shark Spotters booth uphill, you will see dark blue lines queuing up from far out to sea.

There is, however, a problem with learning to surf in this city, or at least with advancing beyond beginner. Yes, there is the broad, sheltered, multidenominational church of Surfers' Corner, where young and old, short-boarders and long-boarders, stand-up paddlers and surf tourists can all have a grand old time getting in each other's way and being very decent about it.

'Too happy clappy for me,' says Alex, 'It's like Sunday school out there.'

But as soon as you want to move out and up a step, there is no intermediate stage. The remaining options are the icy, bone-crunching breaks of the west coast, where waves are fast, steep, hollow, and (like the local crews who dominate them) unforgiving.

'The close, painstaking study of a tiny patch of coast,' writes Finnegan, 'every eddy and angle, even down to individual rocks, and in every combination of tide and wind and swell — a longitudinal study, through season after season, is the basic occupation of surfers at their local break. Getting a spot wired — truly understanding it — can take years. At very complex breaks, it's a lifetime's work.'

My local break is Glen Beach, just five minutes up and over the hill from the city apartment where I live. I have been conducting a longitudinal study of it for ten years now — first as bodysurfer, then surfer — but the results remain inconclusive. It is so fickle, changeable, powerful — by turns sucky, wedgy, peaky, slabby — and full of the city's best surfers. During one session, I tried to duck dive under a set and failed; or at least the wave somehow took and pushed me about fifty metres backwards, all of this underwater, like a cold relentless hand against my forehead, pushing me until I was almost back on the beach. I bobbed up near a local who was just beginning his paddle. 'Fuck,' he said, looking straight at me. Not 'Fuck you' or 'Fucking

hell', just 'Fuck' — as if the disbelief, or maybe just the cold, was so intense that he couldn't bring himself to go any further.

Having witnessed all this, Alex had to walk back to shore and lean on his knees, he was laughing that hard.

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Over beers afterwards, I was tempted to broach the issue of the 'poo-stance': a derisive term for beginners who do a bent-kneed squat on the board, and which is more prominent (and hilarious) with a taller 'poo-man' like Alex. With typical ambition, he would crouch down on a narrow, five-foot something, high performance board that I christened the Toothpick; whereas I (five ten) went for a seven-footer: longer boards are more buoyant and easier to paddle. But this kind of teasing was against the advice of Coach, who had said that the question of poo-manning 'was a sensitive issue that needed to be delicately handled'.

Alex, not making as much sporting progress as he was used to, was trapped inside on a biggish day soon after. He stormed out of the ocean and began a six-month, anti-surfing sulk during which I was left to plough the choppy furrows of False Bay alone. There were tantalising moments that winter, glimpses of greater things: there always are. One day the ragged lines resolved into a long, grey wall that delivered me all the way from backline to shallows, a full minute's worth it felt like, until I dived ecstatically off the board way out beyond the old pavilion.

But a surf session often proceeds according to the law of diminishing returns: as your arms tire out, you are less and less able to paddle onto waves, or under them. Sometimes I would reach a kind of disorientated fugue state out there in the grey wash cycle, towed along the coast by strange rips, far from shore, not knowing quite where I was or what I was hoping to achieve. Where were the outputs, the deliverables, the take-homes? What was there to show for this outrageous amount of time devoted to sitting on a seven-foot fibreglass raft while the world burned? You should have called it after that last decent ride; but you don't, and then there is the ultimate humiliation of paddling back to shore, or having to catch the foam in with the shrieking toddlers. At certain points that winter, I remember being almost too exhausted to pull off my wetsuit. There I would be, towel round my knees in a car park near the railway line, freezing, thinking: what are you *doing*?

Alex was focusing on his job as the founding principal of a small primary school in Philippi. I had driven out there a few times to give the Grade One kids ukulele lessons, but couldn't make much headway amid the general after-school chaos and hilarity. Principal stalked around in his skinny jeans and long coat, six-foot plus and mock serious amid all the kids who would mob his car when he arrived each day, shouting his unpronounceable name with delight. I put it to Principal that Muizenberg was actually very close, for an after-work session, I meant. But he spoke disdainfully about all the tourists clogging up the water now that summer was coming, and bent his head back over Singapore maths, saying maybe we could try Derdesteen, if traffic wasn't too bad.

As I slowly improved — very slowly, and not without major relapses — I also began trying out the occasional bit of surf lingo and surf hauteur, which is full of mockery poked at beginners and laments about crowds and tourists. But to disparage tourists while being a tourist, or traffic when you were traffic, or crowded breaks when you were part of the crowd — this was, Coach had once pronounced, 'the way of the barbarian'.

The remark was not directly related to Finnegan's book, but somehow got tangled up in my reading of it. Spending a lifetime searching out the greatest breaks in the world, and then writing about it (and then winning a Pulitzer for it), Finnegan has to reckon with the paradox at the heart of surf culture: that the mythic quest for the perfect, uncrowded wave inevitably contains (when photographed or written or bragged about) the seeds of its own downfall: surf tourism. As a young man, he is one of the first to surf a paradisaical reef break on a remote island off Fiji; towards the end of the book he returns to the region, now a surf lodge full of social-media streams and spectator boats.

Finnegan is wonderfully ambivalent about the world he describes. He doesn't even seem sure if he likes surfers, or surf culture. Living and paddling out along San Francisco's forbidding Ocean Beach, he is steadily writing about other things: finishing his books on 1980s Cape Town and travels with black reporters in Soweto, still feeling 'mentally flayed' by his time in the country. To write about surfing was something different, and closer to home: it risked losing the 'sizable tract of unconsciousness' near the centre of his life, the self-enclosed, non-verbal quality which means that most surf line-ups are quiet, with everyone cocooned in their

own space and silence, not places for the loud or garrulous.

Stacked five deep in my local surf shop, *Barbarian Days* must itself have been directly responsible for unleashing droves of bookish, middle-aged groms like me on the already crowded line-ups of the English-speaking world. And it is, of course, within the surf shop that such contradictions reach a particular intensity, since they are run by locals who are resentfully kitting out kooks (from the Hawaiian *kuk*, meaning shit). The proprietor was clearly not amped to be selling me a wetsuit, given that it might enable me to ruin his wave later that day.

‘Your arms are thin all the way up to the shoulders, so this one isn’t tight enough.’

I soon realised that it was a broad-based misanthropy though: nothing personal. When another customer walked in, they soon established they were both from Durban, where all you needed was boardies and at worst a rashie. The shop owner began a litany of complaints:

‘It’s shit in Cape Town. First it’s *kak* cold, then you have to drive everywhere, it’s always a mission. In summer it’s the wind, in winter it’s too big. I’ve got ear infections, bru — three operations now. In Durbs you just stroll on over.’

‘But Glen?’ said the punter, ‘That’s nearby?’

‘It’s a *kak* wave.’

Eavesdropping on this, I felt a little hurt on Glen’s behalf, even though I could barely surf it.

‘Those sandbars move around, then there’s all that churned up kelp, all those little bits. And the stream running in there — disgusting. All the shit they pump out there. No man, it’s a *kak* wave, literally.’

Drone footage shot by concerned ratepayers had shown plumes of raw sewage being released just off the city’s most expensive beaches, just a few hundred metres away from the bungalow mansions and anchored party boats. According to a recent scientific study, Kalk Bay snoek were full of Ibuprofen and Hout Bay anemones packed with Vermox. Sea urchins off Sea Point were showing high levels of anti-anxiety and heart meds: just some of the many drugs that filtered daily through bladders and pipes and then out to sea. Every sea creature was full of caffeine, apparently, and probably cocaine too: what must that be like? And several of the desalination plants meant to rescue us from drought couldn’t run. On the Atlantic coast the water in the docks was too polluted; on the Indian Ocean side the problem was algal blooms and red tides.

Despite knowing all this, I somehow still retained my idea of seawater as a healthy, bracing, salty tonic — right up until the session when Alex brushed his foot against a rock in Glen and walked out with an inflamed toe, ‘so angry that it was squeaking’. Only swift medical action saved the digit, or even the foot. The staph infection required hospitalisation, and he was on crutches for a while.

After ‘Glen Toe’, he was more ready to dial things down a little, and we began leading surf outings for the kids from Philippi and Marcus Garvey. I was feeling good about this: taking kids to the ocean, suiting up, combining surfing with social outreach — what was not to like? And they were hugely excited as we guided them across the car park and into the hire shop. The man behind the counter looked up at me and said:

‘Your wetsuit’s on backwards.’

I ran out and back to the car to rip off this burning shirt of humiliation: how could it have happened, a wetsuit I had put on a hundred times before?

Alex wisely didn’t refer to this moment ever again — some things are just beyond the bounds — but he and the owner would exchange a stifled smile every time we arrived with the kids. Then we would wade out into the shallows with two or three shrieking, terrified, delighted children attached to us and try to stand them on a foam board, while also scanning obsessively to make sure that none of the others were being dragged out or under. Often we had to cut our sessions short because one of the assistant teachers would find us and say that people were throwing stones at Golden Arrow buses on Eisleben road, or that tyres were burning near the school gate, and it looked like it might get worse, so we should go now. I half suspected they were just bored waiting on the shore, but we would then drag everyone out of the water and the wetsuits and back on the bus. Then we might paddle out to the backline for our own session, and the quiet and self-enclosure would return. Thinking back to that melee with the kids in the white water — touch and go at times — I realised I had never been clutched so hard by anyone.

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After the trials of summer — crowds, traffic, wind, days of flat seas — winter is here again. Monster storms detonate somewhere between Africa and Antarctica, aftershocks of swell hit the southern peninsula days later, and these break in turn into our social media

feeds. You look up from your inbox and suddenly there are galleries of old warriors and young chargers dropping unimaginably deep into hollows that – just from the wind-scoured, bottle-green of them – you know to be utterly, skull-achingly frigid: the kind of cold that sews ear bones closed. At this point Alex will start getting excited and sending messages, wanting us to hit up Llandudno or Thermopylae, a menacing spot named for an old wreck near the Radisson, one only roused by the chunkiest westerly swell. Here we will (if we even manage to make it out) sit on our boards and let wave after wave pass underneath us, spray whipping back into our faces and the boom of it reaching us a second later.

After several sessions of this, when there was no more pride left to swallow, I had to give a pep talk:

‘We’re ten years away from those waves, at least. Not five, *ten*. We’re Chopsticks level, and this is Rachmaninov. We’re ukulele, and this is Stradivarius.’

And when he started complaining again about the crowds and evangelists at the surf-industrial complex of Muizenberg, I reminded him that we were socialists. Or at least that he had a poster of Jeremy Corbyn on the wall, and that on our surf trip to Vic Bay he had talked my ear off about the British Labour leader and the unwarranted attacks on him by the corporate media. All the way from Riviersonderend to the PetroSA refinery, Alex raged against the anti-Corbynite smear campaign, which was destroying one of the last hopes for a progressive government in the West, which hid its nefarious agenda under the patently ridiculous accusation of anti-Semitism. Which got him started on Israel and Palestine, and then the Christian Zionist lobby, then Modi, Bolsonaro, and Trump, who was building sea walls for his Scottish golf courses even while denying climate change – the sheer anti-human cynicism, the flagrancy of these people, like being forced to eat a turd! Every day, another turd like the one we’d seen floating off Milnerton being gradually forced into your mouth!

It was such a long and impassioned performance, persisting even along the backroads as we were diverted off the highway, first due to protests, and then the lingering smoke of inland wildfires, that I eventually asked him, over some lasagne in Wilderness, what was actually on his mind. And he confessed that he had just learned, just before getting in the car, that he was going to be a father.

And so our trip became both the peak of our surf career so far, and also beginning of its end, or at least

the end of its beginning. The barbarian phase was over. The scandalous stretches of open time and space needed for the pastime would soon be radically reduced, at least for one of us. And so we needed, said Alex, to make it count.

Vic Bay is V-shaped and compact with steep walls, more of a cove really. On its right-hand shore, cottages line a track almost all the way to the point, which means that instead of paddling from the beach you can walk right up to the take-off zone, then pick your way across a few rocks, jump out and you’re in position. Schooled on the wide, shapeless beach breaks of Cape Town, where sometimes the backline moves hundreds of metres out to sea and a stepladder of rumbling white water bars entry, Alex and I could hardly believe this set up. We found a room in the guesthouse closest to the point, where from our romantic and well-appointed flatlet, the wave was just a stone’s throw away.

For that first afternoon we hung back off the shoulder, sussing it out and catching a few scraps left behind by the locals; but in fact there were no leftovers – every wave got ridden, every set picked clean. So the next morning we woke before dawn and picked our way down the rocks in the dark. One of us watched for a lull between sets and gave the signal, the other launched across the white water and into position.

For half an hour in the pre-dawn light, we were alone in the water. Great things were accomplished, apparently. Alex says it was my finest hour, but it’s curiously hard to remember.

What I do remember is that after a while we were joined by another party, who paddled in from the beach: one woman and three men. From the first instant the woman pulled into a wave, it was clear that this was a superb surfer. Her power, control, and room for manoeuvre within the tight space of the break was awesome. At one point she came pumping down the line towards me, less with aggression than supreme confidence, then cut back mere centimetres from my face, so that I was drenched by the torque and spray of her board.

‘I’ve been baptised!’ I said to the other guys in the line-up, who seemed to be her entourage, maybe one of them was her husband. He laughed.

‘I know the feeling.’

A month or so after our trip, Alex emailed me with the subject heading: ‘CHECK OUT 5mins47!’ and a YouTube clip titled ‘Pop Up Like the Pros’. After segments on Kelly and Jordy, there she was, hunkering



ELANDSBAAI, WEST  
COAST. IMAGE  
COURTESY OF THE  
AUTHOR.

down at Pipeline doing sick bottom turns. The three-time world champion Carissa Moore, resident of Honolulu! Yes undoubtedly, I recognised the open face and the powerful stance: Ms Moore! We had indeed been baptised by greatness, sprinkled with holy water.

Which, in retrospect, made what happened next even funnier. As we sat there, pensive in the dawn, trying to hold our place and maintain our dignity, Alex's board suddenly popped out from between his legs like a piece of soap. Entirely unprovoked, and from a resting position, the Toothpick shot skywards like a surface-to-air missile, and he capsized backwards into the water right next to Carissa and her husband, her coach, maybe her dietician, the whole crew obviously on the way up the coast with to the J-Bay Open, where she would go on to lose ('probably the lowest I've ever felt', according to her Instagram), but then stage a triumphant return the following year. 'My journey is imperfect but I am laughing,

loving and learning every step of the way. Thanks for sharing it with me.'

I had to take a wave all the way to shore and lean on my knees, I was laughing that hard.

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After the birth of his son, Alex began travelling out of the country with his partner, who is French, so that young Marcus (named half after Marcus Aurelius, and half Marcus Garvey) could spend time with his grandparents. I began getting swell updates from the coast of Brittany, which looked paradisaical, and pictures of mussels cooked in cider. Then he would come back alone for stretches, resuming his duties at the school. Though I had the sense that he was winding things up there, and would soon break it to me, somewhere beyond the backline, that they were leaving South Africa for good.

After work and on weekends he would surf obsessively as a means of coping with the sudden

separations, and was now clearly better than me: a strong paddler who would power through the impact zone. But our attitudes had shifted slightly, switched round a little. He had less to prove, and seemed more at peace with the Anthropocene shore, no matter how scruffy or unromantic. We met more often in the lumpy swell of Milnerton, where the beach was slowly washing away and plastic bags brushed against your feet like delicate seaweed. When conditions were glassy, a brown haze hung over the docks at the foot of Table Mountain.

Whereas I was now more open to the moments of sublimity that surfing reliably delivers, if not in person, then at least via the feats of others. After all, doesn't the world need people who love music without adolescently wanting to be in a band? Yes absolutely, said Alex, whose decks and vinyl had been in storage for years. And people who love reading without needing to write books? Who know that there are enough books in the world already, great and unrepeatable masterworks, to be read and enjoyed without childishly comparing every sentence with their own paltry efforts? Yes, all true, he agreed — to act otherwise was the way of the barbarian.

A kind of middle-aged enlightenment was dawning, I told him as we pulled off our wetsuits in the car park, keeping an eye on the twerking video being filmed next to us. A woman in a mini-skirt bent over the bonnet and did her thing as the latest gqom banger throbbed from inside the BMW. 'Stop it I like it!' said the car guard who had been trying to sell us fossilised shark teeth. I began shouting it when bobbing up after a pummelling out to sea: 'Stop it I like it!'

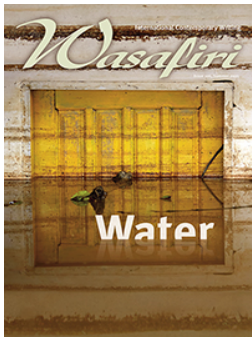
Now we made a noise out there at the backline, crying to heaven with mock anguish if we fell off a two-foot wave, shaking our fists at the gods. Hamming it up, turning the backline into a pantomime and puncturing the male solemnity of it all.

Then one day all the breaks suddenly emptied. The Covid pandemic was keeping everyone at home. Our strict lockdown was a special kind of anguish for the surf community, since as the winter swells came in you knew that conditions would never be this perfect and uncrowded again. After a month or so, news spread that surfers had begun violating the regulations: mass paddle-outs, beach trespasses. Footage went round of police staring helplessly out to sea.

But I was happy to stay home and dry, and to pursue my car park argument to its final logic. The world needed people who loved surfing without feeling the need to surf themselves. Or even further still: who loved watching waves with *nobody on them*. Alex sent me Kookslams compilations of amateurs doing appalling drop-ins or getting dashed onto rocks. I replied with a brooding short called 'Empties': drone footage of Portugal's coast on days just too big and unruly to be rideable. Sixty-foot swells detonated in high definition slo-mo; whole fogbanks of spray blew back across the water in their aftermaths, skittering across the sea surface in the lulls between sets. Now this, I said, was true enlightenment: the camera lingering in the emptiness, the stillness between two waves of the sea.

He messaged back that I should pull myself together, do push-ups, and be ready to get back in the water.





Wasafiri

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