

# CREDITS

## For Septieme Cercle

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*"Ipu kôtô No - Kasikoki kuni zô - Kurenawi No - Iro nor Na ide sô - Omopi sinu tô Mo"*

*"What is said - Brings dread, in this land: - In scarlet - Colours, don't go out - Die from your desire though you might"*

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*Hontôni dômô arigato gozamaisu.*

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# ELECTRIC TOWN

*"When we are children, we speak as a child, and think as a child, and speak as a child. But when we become adults, we must kill the child within us."*

Mamoru Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell*

*Violent wind sets the superstructure of our patrol car vibrating, and the gusts shake the whole vehicle, but fail to divert it from its programmed trajectory. On autopilot we're stuck behind a shipment of synthetic fish, doubtless intended for Tsukiji market. The touch-sensitive control panel on the transparent windscreen announces another typhoon about to hit Shin-Edo Bay. This isn't unusual anymore.*

*For several minutes in the thick heat of the cockpit I've been watching my partner energetically slurping up the soba noodles, which he's been carefully picking out from a carton, marked with a red koi symbol. With concentration and precision he grabs the pinkish noodles with his chopsticks before lifting them to his mouth where they slap his lips before vanishing. Smiling mockingly as always, Gonshiro has no idea that his uniform and the car seat are spattered with proto-calorific mirin sauce. Gonshiro is usually on his best behaviour in the company of a woman, but we've been partners too long for him to be bothered by me.*

*"How many packs have you had, Gonshiro?"*

*He eyes me sardonically as he noisily slurps up the last two strands of noodle before replying. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe four packs."*

*"You do know that even the best pharmaceutical foods no longer have any effect if you take four times the intended dose?"*

*"Yes, I know. But I love their new prawn noodles; they almost taste like real ones! Honestly, Nao, once you've tried FujiLab's ramen or yakisoba, you won't want anything else."*

*"I'm just saying as a friend. You do know that with the new biochips they injected last week, they can work out rapidly that your dietary regime is out of equilibrium? They just have to check your monitoring to see if you're still capable of doing your job. I heard of one policeman from the Shinjuku Special District who got suspended when the probe found amphetamines in his system..."*

*"We all need to find something to help us get through the day."*

*"Sure... I've been overdoing the chocolate a bit recently."*

*The hammering rain drowns out our voices and the thick clouds plunge our faces into shadow, dissipated by the lights from the dashboard and the neon lights of the city. The patrol car leaves the express way at last, following its course to our destination - Akihabara quarter.*

*While Gonshiro's finishing his fourth meal of the day, the news goes on again about the blockade which has been surrounding Japan for almost six months. I have a quick look at the back seat on the middle of which lies my backpack. I hesitate for a few seconds, then grab it and pull out a thick plastic bag containing a curious rope of woven rice-straw and a small cloth bag.*

*"Hey! Those are... \*cough\*," Gonshiro reacts immediately, swallowing the wrong way.*

*"I know."*



"Mind telling me what... \*cough\*... you're doing with a Shimenawa and an Omamori... \*cough\*... Nao?"

"No idea. I found them outside my apartment door this morning. The rope was around the lobby and the amulet was left on the ground."

"Since when has your apartment been a Shinto shrine? The twisted rope - the Shimenawa - is supposed to indicate the site of a spirit, a kami, right?"

"Normally yes. Looks like I've got one living with me. Honestly that's not going to work at all, what with the size of my bed..."

Gonshiro bursts out laughing. Then he asks, his eyes suddenly more alive, "Can I have a look at the amulet?"

"Sure."

\*\*\*\*\*

Akihabara - the "Electric Town," the quarter of Shinjuku where you find the most robotics engineers, computer experts and machines in the city. With the robotics explosion and the arrival of androids in every sector of the economy, from household use to street-cleaning, Akihabara has become a flea market for artificial intelligence. In its covered alleyways, where little electronics shops lie beneath gigantic holographic signs, the recognisable silhouettes of androids work day and night to satisfy their clientele. They are the ones which society has chosen to compensate for our demographic drop, preferring artificial beings to immigration, while births are more and more controlled in order to be able to meet the collective needs of the population. It has been years since I last came across a pregnant woman in the street, doubtless because it has become illegal to procreate without authorisation. Japan has become a gigantic aquarium where the fish have learned to meticulously manage their resources, to manage their own heredity. Like so many others, I have no permission to conceive.

I'm proud of my country. I always have been. Numerous efforts and progress have permitted us little by little to bring ourselves to self-sufficiency, using our deserted countryside to develop gigantic state-run hydroponics farms. Our scientists have managed to create artificial or cloned aquatic livestock, discovering new energy resources such as nanophotovoltaic batteries and creating new technologies like photonic crystals and flexible polymers. Biotechnological laboratories have multiplied, rapidly superseding the gigantic industrial corporations. But this national policy has equally had perceptible consequences in our culture. We no longer distinguish people just by their name, their lineage, their money

or their origins, but equally by their access to nanotechnologies, to genetic manipulations and to the benefits of medical technologies that transform the wealthiest into a completely new, perfect species. Meanwhile, we "naturals," continue to earn a living in a community regulated like a music score.

Nowadays, it is no longer we who have chosen to cut ourselves off from the world, but the world itself which has isolated us.

"We're here," announces Gonshiro, activating the fluid in his blue-coloured uniform to dry up the food stains.

At the rear of a building with a faded facade, situated near the Yamanote metro line, a police cordon denotes the scene of a crime with luminescent studmarks. In the half-light, two plainclothes officers seem to be busying themselves in the rain, their ultrasound capes keeping them from being completely drenched. Getting out of the patrol-car, I'm immediately scanned by a wall advert that I hadn't noticed. The gorgeous woman on the holographic poster seems to be handing me a beauty cream with an unreal smile, all the time vaunting its qualities:

"Otagawa-san, you are only 28 years old, but it is never too early to try SweetSkin, the algae-extract revitalising cream from YumiCorp laboratories."

I quickly catch up with Gonshiro, whose soft gloves covered with blue-coloured filaments are beginning little by little to take on a crimson hue.

"No doubt about it, there's blood around here," he announces.

Near the police cordon another tiresome advertisement scans my retina in moments, and with it my ID, to better adapt itself to my profile.

"Still single, Otagawa-san? Have you thought about the Yoshi X635 android and its range of 'massaging options,' designed especially for your well-being? With a programmable personality, our android will know how to please you and care for your most intimate desires."

Gonshiro doesn't even look at me, embarrassed to meet my gaze after the advertisement, which also catches his eye and begins to tell him of the same virtues of a similar pleasure android. Wiping raindrops from his visor he simply adds:

"All these advertising panels are getting to be a pain. I've got one for the FujiLab prawn noodles right in front of where I live. So you see I've got an excuse..."