

Water festivals have been a very common spectacle throughout most of Asia's antiquity. The Chinese, for example, were known to celebrate the coming of spring by dousing their neighbors in buckets of water. While deeper to the south, the Thai blessed each other in Buddhist rites with showers throughout the streets.

San Juan's Blessing

And a short distance across the sea, Filipinos all across their country remember the birth of St. John the Baptist with a christening of their own.

St. John, the prophet devoid of sin, is typically remembered as the person who performed the baptism of Christ.

Continuing this tradition, modern Catholics place their fingers into a reservoir of holy water as they recite the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit under sealed lips.

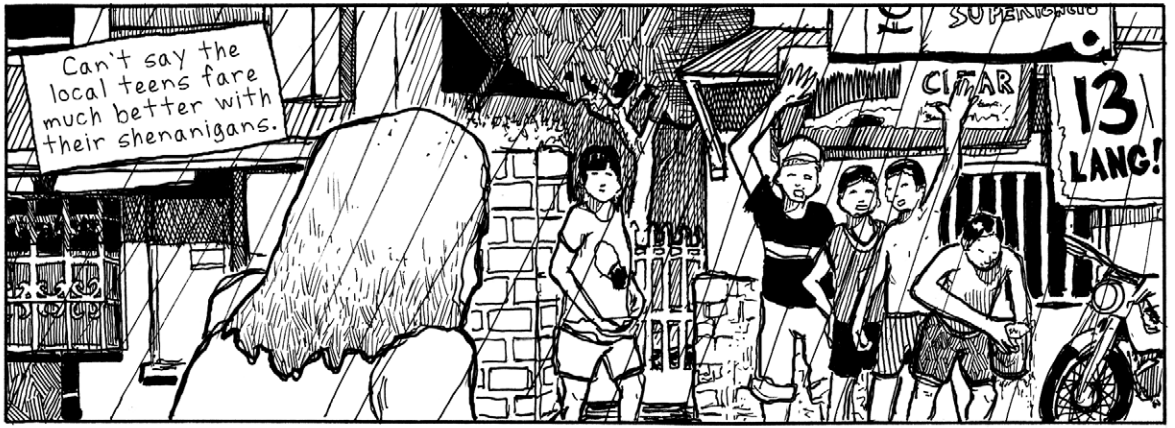
In order to wash away their sins.

All earthly bounds.

In hopes to elevate themselves into salvation.

In rural Pampanga, I think it's safe to say that we are all very blessed...



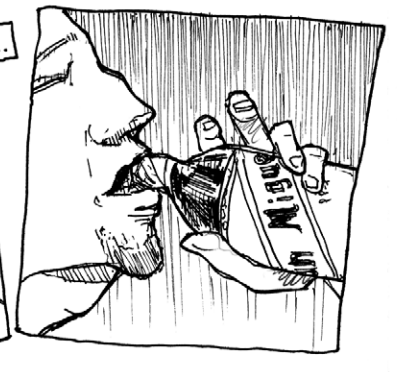
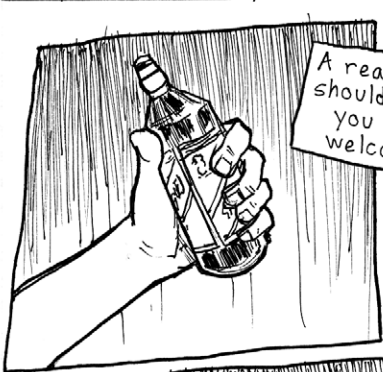
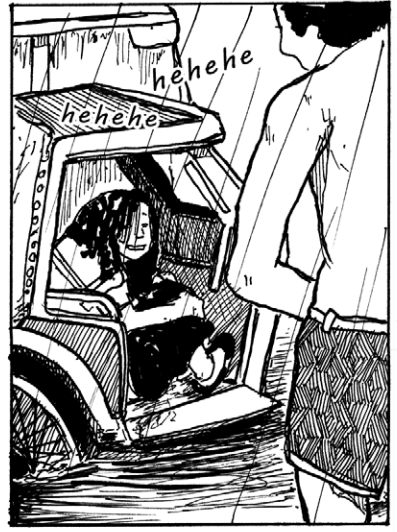
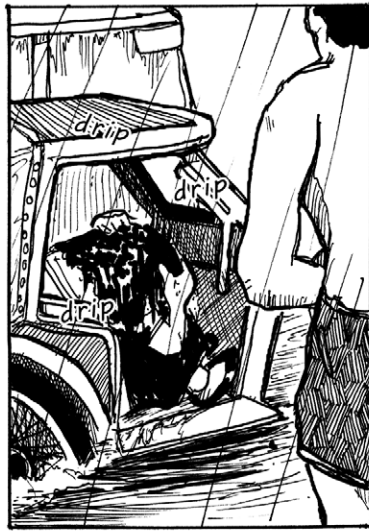


But it does give me a sense of belonging that one doesn't quite feel back in the States. In the Philippines, you can actually engage with a neighbor beyond jacking their Wi-Fi.

Here I get a sense of home, more than my own country 7,000 miles away has ever given me.

Unless you calculate affection by student loans, then I got hospitality in spades there.











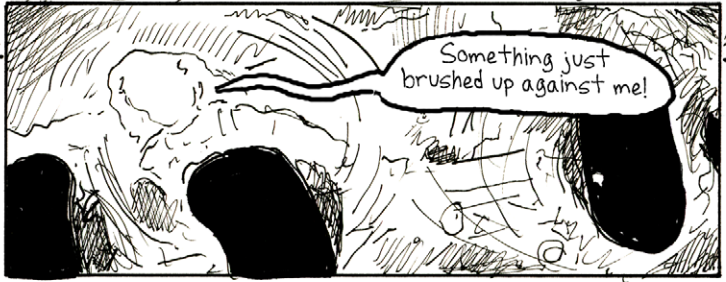
Trust me, her parents aren't interested in that; they just want what's good for their daughter.

Hey, no need to get upset about it. I would want the same thing, too, if I was in their position.

Swoosh
Swoosh



Shoot, what was that!?!
DALIA



Something just brushed up against me!



Maybe it was a snake?

A snake?!

Hehe yeah, you should be careful about the flood and what is underneath.

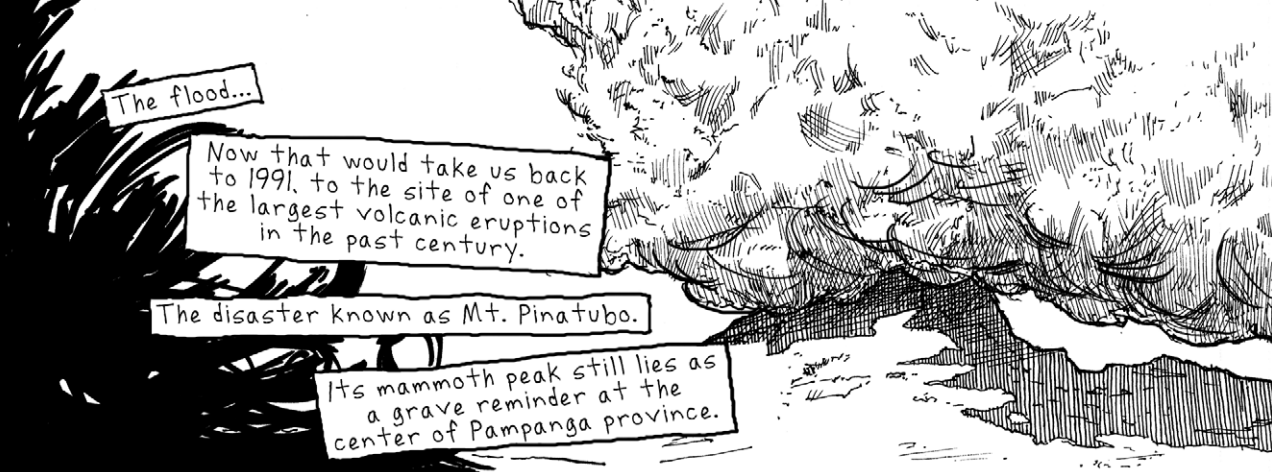


Snakes, gasoline, broken glass...

...some of these things might end up killing you.



How did this area get so flooded, anyway?




The flood...

Now that would take us back to 1991, to the site of one of the largest volcanic eruptions in the past century.

The disaster known as Mt. Pinatubo.


Its mammoth peak still lies as a grave reminder at the center of Pampanga province.



The Philippines itself sits along the edge of two seismic plates, so people here are used to the volcanic activity.


The islands themselves were formed over many years of magma cooling in the ocean.

But this was no ordinary blast.



In early June, amid billowing smoke that filled the skies, 50,000 people were given the order to evacuate.

And as this fiery threat moved in from the north...



...Super typhoon Yunya made its landing in Mindanao on the country's southern coast.

Where it choked the islands with downpours that swept downpours from their roots.

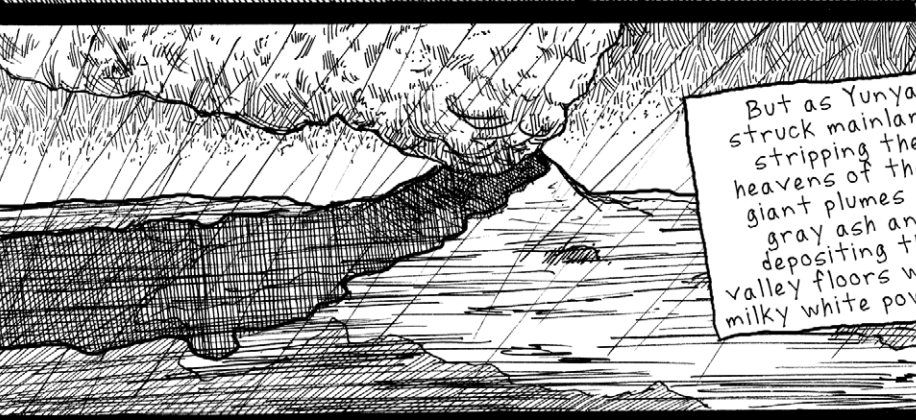
Both storms continued on a collision course with one another.

To bring hell upon whatever was unfortunate enough to be at its epicenter.



The service members at Clark Air Base keenly kept watch for any erratic seismic activity.

Waiting intently for the exact moment when the tremors deep within the Earth might erupt violently.



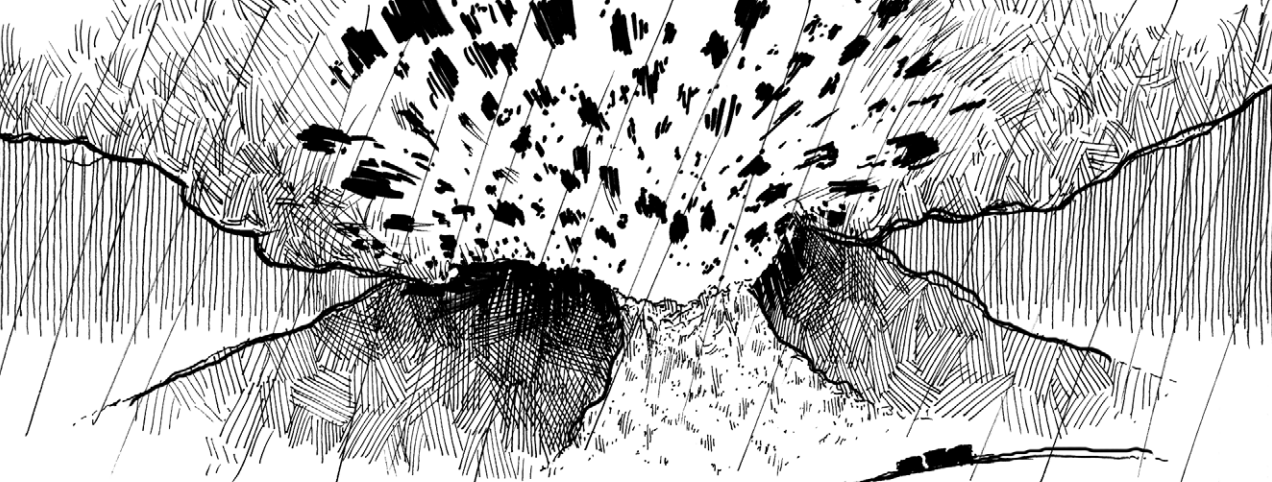
But as Yunya struck mainland, stripping their heavens of their giant plumes of gray ash and depositing the valley floors with a milky white powder...



...even the Americans didn't want to stick around for the impending cataclysm to unfold.

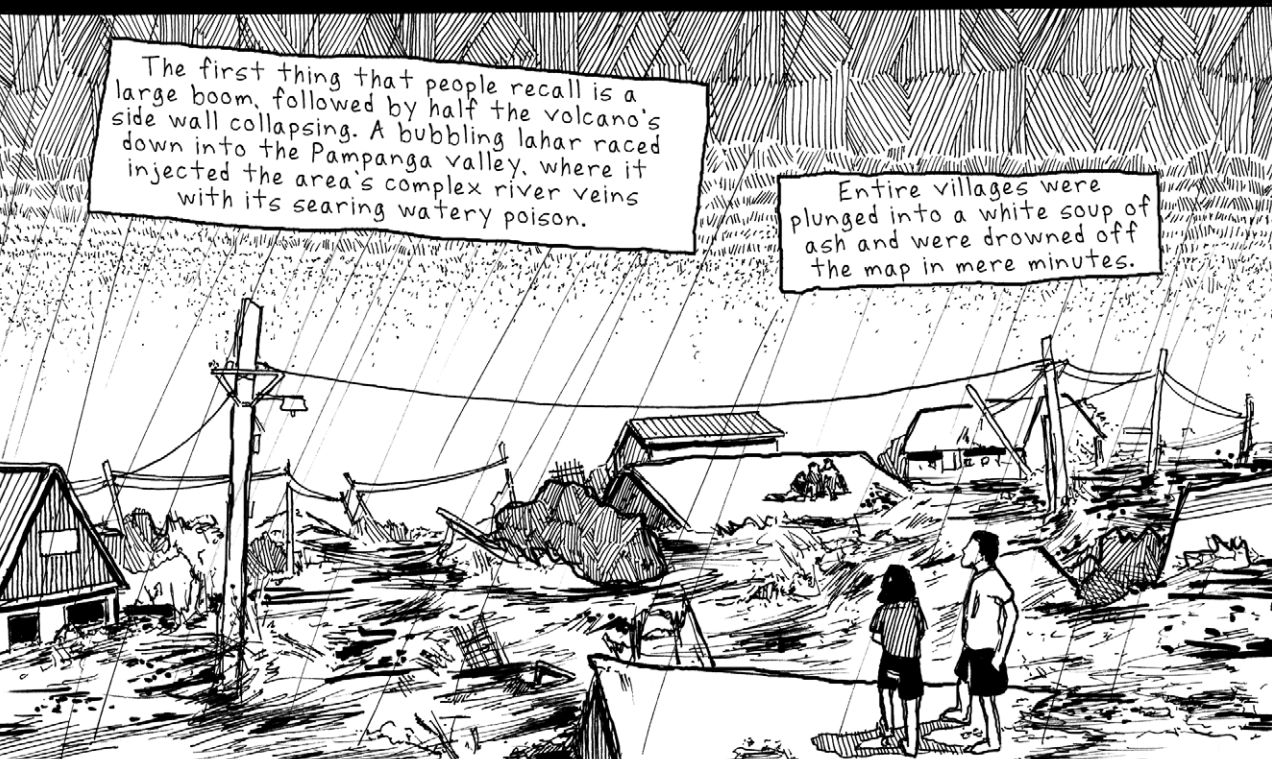


At 1:42 PM local time, Mt. Pinatubo unleashed its fiery assault upon the Pampanga valley.



The first thing that people recall is a large boom, followed by half the volcano's side wall collapsing. A bubbling lahar raced down into the Pampanga valley, where it injected the area's complex river veins with its searing watery poison.

Entire villages were plunged into a white soup of ash and were drowned off the map in mere minutes.

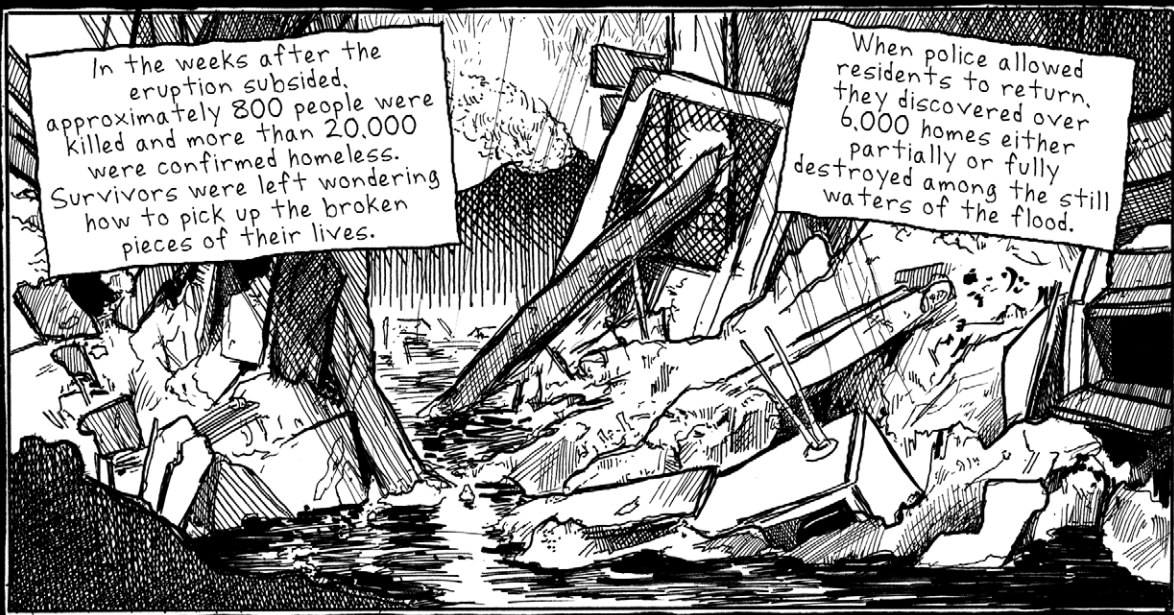


And those that were too foolish to leave before...



...were submerged when the rocky tephra collapsed their roofs, with residents meeting the same dire as their homes.



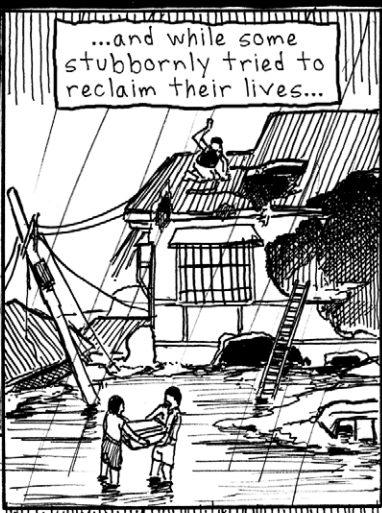


In the weeks after the eruption subsided, approximately 800 people were killed and more than 20,000 were confirmed homeless. Survivors were left wondering how to pick up the broken pieces of their lives.

When police allowed residents to return, they discovered over 6,000 homes either partially or fully destroyed among the still waters of the flood.



Unfortunately, the waters never receded...



...and while some stubbornly tried to reclaim their lives...



...many eventually abandoned hope and left.

While the Filipino government and humanitarian aid organizations set aside funds to build levies to reroute the water levels, a considerable amount of that money was embezzled by politicians from all levels of bureaucracy. Each year now, towns like Macabebe slowly succumb to the ever-rising floods.

Many of the inhabitants have moved to Manila and surrounding provinces, but most of the poor remain here.

Twenty years have passed since Mt. Pinatubo erupted, yet its effects are still being felt. Flooding such as this, along with climate change, threaten to displace at least 13.6 million Filipinos by 2050. By then, most of the ruins of these towns will be fully submerged.

