

# unto heaven

a solo larp about adaptation and reclamation  
by michael crowley

"Can a tree be feral?"  
– Matthew Battles, **Tree**

"Better invading Asian citrus beetles than no beetles at all."  
– Michelle Tea, **Black Wave**

*We humans are gone from here. We left behind everything, all the great works of our cities, our industries, things built and unfinished. In and atop them, you grow. You are a tree; you are a community of trees. What we used to call an invasive species, or a mutation thereof: adaptive, willful, intentional. Your roots dig deep into tenuous soil, breaking concrete and stone. Your branches twine towards the sky, grasping toward even the slimmest shafts of light. In swaying silence you contemplate your evolution, your expansion within this landscape. And slowly, in the passing of years, you move.*

*Your leaves are many. What color are they?*

*Your bark is strong. What does it feel like?*

*We brought your ancestors to this place a long time ago. Why? Does that matter, now?*

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This game is played over the course of a walk through urban or otherwise non-rural spaces. During the course of your journey, imagine yourself to be the creature described above: a mutant tree and its progeny, specimens of an invasive species, now propagating in the ruins of the world humanity left behind.

If you ever feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable, take a breath and let your mind wander away from the game. Return when and if you feel is right.

While you are walking, take your time. Move slowly and breathe deeply. Imagine time passing in weeks, seasons, years. Consider how the space around you would degrade in the absence of human inhabitants, how its ruins become home to new life. Imagine your answers to the prompts below.

∞ *What are the seasons like? Are there seasons, anymore?*

∞ *What human works remain? What are lost?*

∞ *How do you feel the passage of time?*

∞ *How do you feel towards this landscape?*

If and when you arrive to one or more of the places mentioned here, find a comfortable and safe spot nearby to stand or sit and remain still for a while (as long as you feel appropriate). Watch as time passes, moment to moment. Consider how this place will change. Imagine your answers to the prompts below.

## **a public park or empty lot**

∞ *You could propagate easily here, if not for the other plants. Who are your competitors? How could you choke them out? Could you reach an accord, instead?*

∞ *You share this place with countless fauna, as well. What of yourself do you willingly give them? How do they repay you? What do they steal without your permission?*

## **an underpass, tunnel, or alleyway**

∞ *Light here is precious. How must you bend yourself to thrive here? What must you lose?*

∞ *Other animals pass through here, troubling your trunk and branches. What are they? What do they leave behind?*

## **a drainage ditch, canal, or stream**

∞ *Water is life. Is it cool or hot? How does the water taste on your roots? How greedily do you drink?*

∞ *Water is life, but the insects it sustains bear illness. What sickness do you suffer? How might you overcome it?*

## **a parking lot or strip mall**

∞ *You break your roots through the concrete, fracture the slabs as you grow. How does that feel? Does it hurt you?*

∞ *You might be lonely, here. What else can find the purchase to grow? Are they friendly, hostile, indifferent to you?*

When your walk ends, briefly reflect on the trees you've been. Decide what your survival means for this place.

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This game was created while reflecting on the *ailanthus altissima*, sometimes called the *Tree of Heaven*, native to northeast and central China but an invasive species in North America. It can be easily identified by its long, compound leaves and sour smell. It's weedy, opportunistic, and fast-spreading. But it will also grow where other plants cannot, especially in otherwise inhospitable urban areas. If you meet one on the road, I cannot tell you what you should do. It's likely you should try to kill it, but part of me thinks you might save some seeds and plant them somewhere there's absolutely nothing else but concrete.