

Tao Lin

North American
Hamsters

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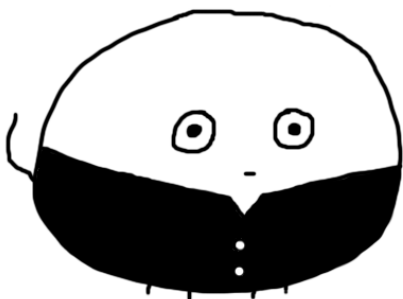
Preface to the 2014 Edition

Wow, happy birthday, Allison. Did you know that Tao Lin wrote a series of short articles about hamsters, and included hamster illustrations? You're such a big fan that you probably already knew that. Since you're a big fan, here's a little booklet of Tao Lin's hamsters. I'd like to think that he wouldn't be upset with me for printing this.

Tony Fader
Seattle, WA

“Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy” Hamster

Despite being considerably “less rare” than the “*Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” *Hamster* (due to a much higher reproduction rate and a more balanced male-to-female ratio, with there however still being more males than females), not much is known about the “*Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” *Hamster* due to a near-extreme lack of media coverage and an overall, near-complete lack of pub-



“Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy” Hamster.

lic interest (in terms of the hamster itself; its “wonderful, crisp, and tender”—according to *L Magazine*—recordings actually enjoy very strong sales in a consistent, recession-proof manner). In a 2013 feature article in *The New York Times Magazine* a “Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy” Hamster named John Thomason atypically received extensive coverage—to the extent of 5839 words, of which 4794

were, however, focused on the question of “exactly why” the article’s author has “long harbored the strong suspicion” that the specific “*Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” *Hamster* named John Thomason is “being non-eccentric on-purpose?” and therefore, from a certain “second level” perspective, actually way more eccentric than the “*Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” *Hamster*, whose eccentricity is conveyed “directly, genetically, honestly, and without irony—without,” according to the article’s author, Janice Mikaela, “the questionably legitimate post/meta-artfulness that John Thomason has subtly deployed in his life and work ever since, as far as my research shows, he was born.” The feature article included two full-page photographs and—interspersed throughout—eight smaller photographs (these smaller ones focused on her eyes, hands, forearms, mouth, forehead, and hair) of Janice Mikaela,

who was previously known primarily for her eccentric behavior at panel discussions and “elegantly outrageous” (*Vogue*) hairstyle, instead of portraits of the pianist, who also was not interviewed or contacted for the article.

Hunting Tips: Approach the “*Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” Hamster after a concert asking for its autograph—stunning it, as no one cares enough to want its autograph. Ask another question—any question—to further destabilize the “*Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy*” Hamster’s perception of reality (that no one is interested in it) in order to cause cardiac arrest, effectively ending its life. Finally, at your leisure, place it in a plastic baggie.

Cooking Tips: Baste in a paste of olive oil, wakame, hijiki, tamari at a low heat, “moving it around” occasionally. Serve over a thick—but not too thick—bed of lettuce. Great with red wine, diluted carrot juice, or—surprisingly—almond milk.

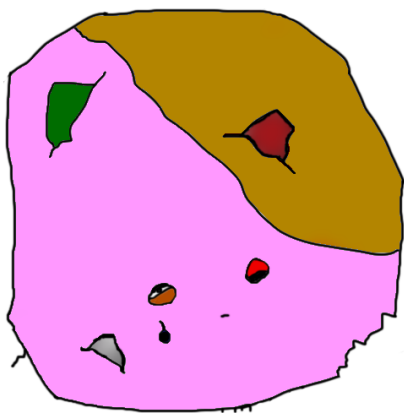
Average weight/height (record)	.9 lbs/3.3" (1.6 lbs/3.9")
Average life expectancy (record)	18.4 years (36.9 years)
Favorite book(s)	<i>The Mind of God</i>
Favorite band(s)	anything by Chopin, Brahms
Favorite movie(s)	<i>Eternal Sunshine</i>
Favorite sexual position	missionary

"Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy" Hamster facts.

Factory-Farmed Hamster

Force-fed intravenously for the last four days of its eighteen-day, regimentally/existentially genocidal lives of “allegory-like” “extreme, sustained, increasing pain,” the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* is by-far the most common hamster in North America, with a population expected to exceed 200 billion by 2020, a number expected, henceforth, to grow at a rate of 26.4% per year, as fast-food companies expand to third-world countries. Born in darkness in a space not large

enough for it to turn around without doing a kind of back-flip, the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* lives its next three days/nights in a mostly-unconscious haze of bone-level inflammation and intermittent paralysis, sometimes reflexively jerking forward/backward .5 to .8 inches to prevent its lower body from “crystallizing” in an advanced form of atrophy, while being force-fed every four hours a mixture of non-organic corn, metastasized fecal-matter, industrial-strength antibiotics, 4 to 9 varieties of growth hormones. The next eleven days the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* is force-fed pellets containing the meat/bones/tumors/fur of “fellow, deceased” *Factory-Farmed Hamsters* grinded—along with their “waste,” which often is scientifically “not discernable” from their “bodies”—into paste-like matter that is “marinated” 4-8 hours in an antibiotic-hormone mixture and then dehydrated in gigantic microwaves.



Factory-Farmed Hamster.

For the final four days of its “surreally bleak existence” (*Mother Jones*) the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* is moved into a larger pen and positioned, within rubber canopies, in a manner allowing its mouth, facing “upwards,” to be uncomplicatedly filled, five times a day, in a kind of “funneling action,” in which former migrant farmhands without passports, in a job

with a 37% long-term survival rate (many “succumb” to various cancers after four years), “funnel” (a misnomer, as actually a “tube” is used) a non-dehydrated form of “meat/corn paste” directly into the stomach of the *Factory-Farmed Hamster*, 73% of which are, scientifically, “in comas” by the morning of the fourth day. In 2010 the FDA declared it governmentally acceptable for meat labeled “grade-A” to continue to be force-fed up to 35 hours after its source is “no longer conscious,” increasing profits by 18%. In America an emerging, popular conspiracy theory is that factory-farmed meat is harmful to those who eat it; connected to or “in support of” that conspiracy, some say, is the taboo, or “feeling of shame/inauthenticity/[something],” of buying organic food, which itself is related, some say, to the vaguely embarrassing, or “offensive,” even, choice to spend more money on [anything] than “the low-

est amount possible”—a feeling caused, perhaps, to some degree, by vague intuitions of “‘taking part’ in ‘the conspiracy,’” along with the influence of the powerful abstraction most people ultimately convey in the form of the word “bourgeoisie,” according to one conspiracy theorist whose YouTube videos were deleted by YouTube after pressure from the FDA, who acted “in preemption,” according to a fourth-party conspiracy theorist (whose YouTube videos were also deleted but have since reappeared on Vimeo), to pressure from the meat/dairy industry.

Hunting Tips: Wearing a military-grade gas mask and a full-body-coverage suit made of space-grade polymers (to protect against deadly skin lesions and tumors, which have been known to “fly off” *Factory-Farmed Hamsters*, when hit by metal doors or simply when they “burst”), cut a small hole in the corner of a factory-farm shed at night. Place

the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* in a garbage bag or shoebox, as it will not fit in a plastic baggie, taking care not to collapse from empathy-induced “intense depression” or “fear of ‘evil’ in the world,” as the *Factory-Farmed Hamster* will likely appear “horrifically grotesque” (Stephen King via *Esquire*), be blind, likely “crying.”

Cooking Tips: Sprinkling antibiotics continuously, grind in entirety after soaking in a bowl of hydrogen peroxide for 5 to 8 hours. Boil with garlic, dehydrate, condense into pellets for fish food or “little balls” for dog or cat food. Add [anything] for bulk, grind with antibiotics, and resell to international or outsourced factory farms as “grade-A factory farm feed,” to second/third-world countries as “meal packets,” or fourth-party dog food producers as “all-natural, high-grade dog food guaranteed to give your pet’s fur a healthy sheen.”

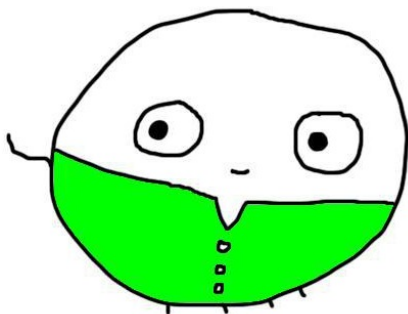
Average weight/height (record)	4.4 lbs/4.2" (4.8 lbs/4.6")
Average life expectancy (record)	.049 years (.049 years)
Favorite book(s)	doesn't know what a "book" is
Favorite band(s)	doesn't know what a "band" is
Favorite movie(s)	doesn't know what a "movie" is
Favorite sexual position	doesn't know what "sex" is

Factory-Farmed Hamster facts.

“Unable to Process Neutral Statements as Neutral” Hamster

Widespread, “to the point of rampancy,” some say—not inaccurately, as it can “indeed” be found on every continent—but concentrated most densely in the United States and other etiologically British populations, the “*Unable to Process Neutral Statements as Neutral*” Hamster, or *Unableham*, views nearly all hamster-

caused phenomenon (and most natural phenomenon, also, to some degree) as strongly and defaultedly rhetorical. In a 2012 study of over ten thousand *Unable-hams* 94% identified the sentence “I went to Wal-Mart, bought a black shirt and two bananas, paid with my HSBC debit card” as directly conveying one of the following: “America’s consumerist economy is destructive and amoral” (54%), “generation [whatever the current generation is labeled] suffers from a non-European form of ‘ultimately inauthentic’ ennui unique to its historical/cultural/technological context” (20%), “Banana Republic’s labor tactics are shameful and fascist” (11%), “the government should bail-out banks but only in times of severe, potentially long-term, international crisis” (9%). An “astounding, simply astounding” (*Village Voice*) 63% said they would refer to the sentence in a court of law, under oath, if asked, as “scathing.” A follow-up study



“Unable to Process Neutral Statements as Neutral” Hamster.

designed to test the extent of the *Unable-ham*’s genetic inability to interpret reality without framing it in a personal, hierarchical, often “strongly opinionated” system found that 39% interpreted the Atlantic Ocean as “against the Bourgeoisie” and 47% interpreted the Mona Lisa as “one of the strongest elements of propaganda against the unfair treatment of women workers in late 19th century

America since Chopin's second Ballade, the one in F Major" (due to a lack of funding the study was also designed to test the ability of hamsters to discern "since" statements in sentences where the chronology is grammatically illogical). Cross-breeds well with *Shit-Talking Hamsters* and, surprisingly, *Freshwater Hamsters*.

Hunting Tips: Approach it in a manner somehow "indisputably friendly," employing a level of sarcasm that causes "strong discomfort," if needed, as you force the muscles on your face into certain configurations—effectively overpowering, if successful, the Unableham's "subconscious, possibly uncontrollable" cognitive mode of "continuously replacing the metaphysical perspective of others with one's own metaphysical perspective," causing it to view your demeanor as "amiable," to some degree, so that maybe it will move toward you slightly. Repeat

until the desired specimen is “in range.” Place it in a plastic baggie.

Cooking Tips: Shave, rinse, cut into 5-10 chunks—optionally, deep-freeze, at this point, for a more chicken-like consistency—and dip in an egg-and-butter-based mixture, coating each chunk evenly/completely, before sprinkling cornstarch on them. Carefully immerse in a vat of hot oil, the oil of your choice. Serve with steamed broccoli or waffle fries.

Average weight/height (record)	1.4 lbs/3.6" (1.8 lbs/4.1")
Average life expectancy (record)	12.2 years (31.4 years)
Favorite book(s)	<i>Life of Pi</i>
Favorite band(s)	<i>Radiohead</i>
Favorite movie(s)	<i>Dances with Wolves</i>
Favorite sexual position	doggy-style

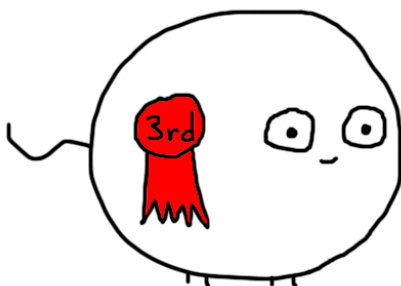
"Unable to Process Neutral Statements as Neutral" Hamster facts.

Prize-Winning Hamster

Previously identifiable by the conspicuous growths on the sides of their bodies that resemble (and, tests have shown, literally are) prize ribbons, many Prize-Winning Hamsters have, in the past three years, begun amputating their ribbons in painless procedures utilizing laser technology first developed for use in global warfare. (It should also be noted that it's not uncommon, even for those who can afford the expensive laser procedure, for Prize-Winning Hamsters to per-

form DIY surgeries that are often excruciatingly painful and sometimes fatal.) Today an estimated 38% of Prize-Winning Hamsters have de-prized themselves, opting viscerally out of the hierarchy they've been born into mysteriously. The other 62% can be identified by prize ribbons ranging mostly from 1st place to 10th, though rankings as low as the mid 40s (and, once, 649th, which is the lowest on record) have been photographed, usually while the subject is running away in shame. It's been speculated that Prize-Winning Hamsters of each ranking—from 1 to 1000—exist in relatively equal quantity, but that those lower in rank, embarrassed and afraid to be seen, live deep underground, therefore seem rare or nonexistent.

Hunting Tips: Prize-Winning Hamsters can be insanely confident (sprinting through public spaces shouting in joy while flailing its entire body, in extreme



Prize-Winning Hamster.

cases) or severely lacking in self-esteem (crying in small, lightless holes while eating baked goods in scenes of nonhumorous bleakness), depending on the ranking of their prize ribbon. Approach a specimen ranked high enough (9th or better is recommended) that it won't immediately escape in fear, placing it in a plastic baggie.

Cooking Tips: Carefully remove the prize ribbon, which can be used in any

situation requiring a prize ribbon of the given ranking. Peel and slice the body like a kiwi, using the skin and its connective fatty tissue to lightly broil the body, which can be sliced or made into a paste. For de-prized hamsters, before doing anything else, excise and discard the scar tissue, which can appear depressing, or at least distracting, and therefore unappetizing, on an otherwise consistently contoured piece of meat.

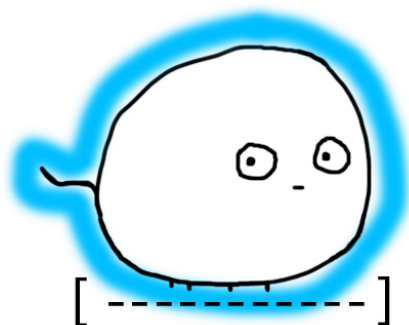
Inconspicuously Hyperlinked Hamster

Nondescript unless touched with a force between 18 and 26 psi, causing the appearance of a dotted line sort of hovering beneath it and a light blue glow emanating from its surface, indicating it's a hyperlink, or 'link', the Inconspicuously Hyperlinked Hamster is otherwise a fine, vegetarian, outgoing species of North American hamster—hard-working, considerate, perceptive, a boon to its ecosys-

tem, with no known allergies or viral susceptibilities.

Hunting Tips: Carefully enclose your own body in not-loose clothing before getting out of your car, because touching an Inconspicuously Hyperlinked Hamster at a force exceeding 26 psi (atmospheric pressure is around 14.7 psi at sea level) will instantly relocate your consciousness out of the vessel of your body to [unknown], some say. Others, however, say there's no reason to believe the dotted lines and light blue glows are hyperlinks—that they serve some other purpose, such as camouflage. Then there are those who focus on how it seems impossible to prove the presence or non-presence of a consciousness in a body, therefore it's not possible to detect whether a body's consciousness has, or has not, been teleported to [unknown].

Cooking Tips: Considered a delicacy because of the process of delinking that



Inconspicuously Hyperlinked Hamster.

must be completed before it can be seasoned and eventually ingested, Inconspicuously Hyperlinked Hamsters appear on the menus of most mid-to-high-end restaurants around the world. The most common method of delinking is via an assembly-line process that ends in the hamster being placed in a higher-dimensional form of MSWord and a worker pushing 'Undo Hyperlink' on a touch-screen.

Bearded Hamster

Bearded Hamsters are hairy in entirety, not only around the mouth, but—because hamsters' heads are also their bodies—from a distance will often resemble something like a hovering, faceless beard. Bearded Hamsters are a harmless, docile species, however. Once discriminated for seeming dirty, despite a highly-publicized, government-funded campaign that proved they were 58% cleaner as a species than the average North American hamster (they clean themselves more often, it was shown), Bearded Hamsters are now celebrated

and loved internationally for their ability to produce body-size coats of thick, voluminous hair in three to four days.

Hunting Tips: Gently place the Bearded Hamster not in a plastic baggie, as one might expect it be recommended, but in a three-gallon fish-tank that has been padded heavily with layers of cotton. The padding will preserve the natural, remarkable softness of the valuable hair's sensitive follicles.

Cooking Tips: After depilation it's recommended to microwave the Bearded Hamster 90 seconds for the first ounce and 10 seconds for each additional ounce. Serve on a bed of romaine lettuce and shaved fennel.



Bearded Hamster.

Reading Group Questions

1. Why do you think Lin's hamsters lack noses?
2. Lin has decided to focus on hamsters from North America. Do you think similar hamsters exist on other continents?
3. Lin expresses surprise at the pairing of "Non-Eccentric Piano Prodigy" Hamsters with almond milk. Why is this surprising?

4. Some hamsters are grinning, while others have neutral facial expressions. How do these relate to the characters in *Richard Yates* and *Taipei*?
5. Lin mentions that Prize-Winning Hamsters have growths that “resemble (and, tests have shown, literally are) prize ribbons.” What does it mean for something to *literally* be a prize ribbon?