Hi Paul, Binky, et al.,

Thanks for asking us to make a proposal to serialize Haruki Murakami’s novel. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* is beautiful and wondrous, and I love it a lot. It feels like a seminal book in Murakami’s career, one that represents a real shift in the way he writes and suggests an even richer and more potent set of books in the future. I was reminded in a weird way of Tom Stoppard’s career in the pre- and post-*The Real Thing* eras: Canny theatergoers had always understood that there was a heart underneath the tricks and traps, but that play announced to the world that intense emotion could be explored through his method as movingly as it could through realistic drama. Similarly, anyone who’s ever discounted Murakami’s fiction for being unfeeling simply because of its intricacy can’t make that claim after reading this complex and touching book.

Slate feels like the perfect home for CTT. We’re able to innovate in its presentation across all departments – editorial, art, interactives, and video. And it’s exactly the right kind of book to appeal to our readership, which I find to be both nerdy and searching for transcendence. (Does that sound lame? I really think it’s true!) More to the bottom line, Slate sells books; just ask Amy Webb, a data engineer who [broke down the numbers on her press hits for *Data: A Love Story*](http://www.datalovestory.com/DataAboutData), and found a single excerpt on Slate drove conversation and sales more than pretty much any other hit.

I want to give CTT the presentation it deserves, so I’m proposing a pretty ambitious excerpt plan: Three splashy pieces, all published in the same week, digging into the book’s story and themes in three very different ways. They are:

1. An interactive introduction to the five friends at the core of the book – and a puzzle that explores the importance of music to the story

2. A long, self-contained excerpt from the middle of the book that unveils the story’s suspenseful tone without spoiling plot details

3. A video involving Murakami himself, exploring Tsukuru’s career as a train station designer and engineer

**1. “LE MAL DU PAYS” HAND INTERACTIVE**

When you come to the page, you see the hand from the book’s jacket floating on the screen, inviting you to play with it.

<http://bit.ly/RWoHOg>

Each finger of the hand represents one of the five members of TT’s original group of friends: Aka (red), Ao (blue), Shiro (white), Kuro (black), and Tsukuru (the map). When you click on one, the finger depresses, a piano note sounds, and up pops a window that hints at some aspect of each character’s identity – and the relationship between them all. A GIF of a woman’s hands at a potter’s wheel. A cell phone, ringing “Viva Las Vegas.” A bobbing head, alone in a vast sea. Short excerpts from the text: Aka on the fading away of Shiro, Ao’s inspirational rugby speech. Some of these excerpts will include redactions to hide plot twists. For each person in the group, there will be 5 or more character popups, delivered randomly, so the interactive will reward multiple clicks as visitors explore and start to suss out the relationships between these characters.

<http://bit.ly/1hORkCZ>

<http://bit.ly/1nPti26>

But it will become evident that something is wrong. Many of the excerpts and images will suggest conflict between these people, and as you click more often, you wonder: What happened to these people? Many clues, both subtle and unsubtle, will also point you towards Liszt’s “Le mal du pays” – video, sheet music, Wikipedia links, etc. Click on the musical note in the corner and the hand positions itself above a piano keyboard. Now clicking on a finger makes it play a note, and you realize that each finger plays its own note, and you can play those notes in sequence, with a scorecard at the bottom of the interactive keeping track of your progress. It’s a puzzle!

<http://bit.ly/1iZ4Fg6>

What eight notes should you play? “Le mal du pays,” as it happens, opens with a famous eight-note figure – one that can be played easily with a single hand. Play that figure, and – *whoosh* – the interactive opens up, and you are rewarded with an unlocked short excerpt, revealing the rift between the friends: The first paragraph on page 4, the first paragraph in chapter 2, and a few sentences from Tsukuru’s fateful phone call from Ao.

<http://bit.ly/1iZ4NMr>

The interactive is fun for casual visitors, who will of course see a book-buying link in the interactive itself. But it will also reward dogged puzzle-solvers – or, quickly, people who discover the solution on social media and want to try it out themselves.

**2. THE STORY OF HAIDA’S FATHER**

This long excerpt, from pages 75 to 102 in the book, is a perfectly self-contained story. It is mysterious and engaging; when I was reading the novel, it was this story that hooked me, transformed me from a person enjoying a book to a reader devouring a book. It introduces and elaborates upon many of the themes of the novel: The transformative power of music; the incursion of the supernatural upon the everyday; even the symbolic application of color to individuals. And it ends with a hell of a cliffhanging kicker: “That night, several strange things happened.”

We’ll run the piece on our big, beautiful Fresca template, which allows for incorporation of plentiful imagery and offers a more luxurious reading experience than our ordinary article page. It’s the mode we reserve for our biggest, most important pieces, like [Josh Levin on the Welfare Queen](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2013/12/linda_taylor_welfare_queen_ronald_reagan_made_her_a_notorious_american_villain.html) or [this memoir of dementia](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/family/2014/03/dementia_and_aging_diary_of_a_sufferer_of_microvascular_disease.html) from Gerda Saunders.

<http://bit.ly/QNX1tu>

A new development in that Fresca template: We can now make the large hero image at the top of the piece an interactive. So the hand on this page will move: The rectangles will flock like birds, and you’ll be able to drag them around the image. But the four colorful fingers will stay together and flee the Tsukuru rectangle; no matter how much you chase them, he will never get close.

**HARUKI MURAKAMI AND TRAINS**

Two of my favorite sections of the book are Tsukuru’s reverie in Tokyo Station (p. 158) and his visit in chapter 19 to JR Shinjuku Station. In both cases I was captivated by Tsukuru’s musings on the unknowability of those flows of humans sweeping past, but also by the actual mechanics of efficiency in a place that crowded, managing which is of course Tsukuru’s job.

The third part of our package is a video with Murakami himself, reading one of those sections and then talking not explicitly about the novel but about trains and train stations. Depending on his availability, this could take the form of a video interview at Grand Central in New York or an audio interview overlaying footage of humans streaming in and out of stations. (In either case the interview would be conducted by Slate’s technology columnist Seth Stevenson, who has written beautifully on design, Japan, and train travel.) But the final product, produced by Slate’s video team, will allow readers to get a sense of the fascination the book, its hero, and its author have for this unique environment, while complementing the other two facets of the excerpt to give a sense of the multidimensionality of the work. It will run on one of our wide, clean Fresca template pages embedded in a new, much larger video player our dev team is itching to launch with something special.

<http://bit.ly/1lvO9RL>

The hero image on this page will feature a moving video image of a Tokyo station (in the style of [the image on our Slate Plus pitch page](http://www.slate.com/plus)). But tying the piece to the previous two will be those same five colorful rectangles – this time chasing each other as connected cars of a train, zipping across the center of the image.

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Three “excerpts” – only one of which is a traditional excerpt. The goal of the series will be to pique reader interest in this remarkable novel while also beginning to explore, in a manner both entertaining and illuminating, the themes and issues at play in CTT. Each one will stand alone as an enticement; all three together work to give prospective readers a real sense of what the book truly is and why it’s interesting, without spoiling any of its secrets or surprises. We’ll include buying links on every page, and not just show the cover but use it as the central motif of our own visual treatment of the excerpts.

Each one of these excerpts will occupy great real estate on our homepage, as well as get multiple mentions on our Facebook page (800K likes) and our Twitter feed (830K followers). Julia and co. will plug it with enthusiasm to the 100,000 book-buying listeners of the Culture Gabfest. We’ll push it in email newsletters and advertise it through inline links throughout the Slate Book Review.

But more than that, we’ll recognize the excerpt for what it is: an event. An event for readers, because a major new work by a world-class author is becoming available in English for the first time; and an event for us, because we’ve never before presented fiction of this caliber and in this grand a manner. So expect us to pull out all the stops to make sure the world knows what we’re doing.

(To see all images together: <https://sites.google.com/site/dailyphotopool/>)

Thanks for letting us pitch Slate as a home for *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and his Years of Pilgrimage*. We’re all eager to get to work.

Thanks,

Dan