

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Library of Forking Paths Interview with Valla Vakili

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, April 26th, 2012

When you read sensitively, you hear echoes in the words, the way a phrase in Coetzee shadows a line by Milton.

*Small Demons, a startup site, promises to bring this experience to your laptop: to connect with books with everything they reference in other books and in the world at large. Imagine a thread connecting a Neil Gaiman novel with Greek historian Herodotus, a Patsy Cline song, the original Hawaii 5-0 TV series and a whiff of Jack Daniels, and you begin to get a picture of the possibilities. I spoke to CEO and founder **Valla Vakili** in his Santa Monica office between his trips to LAX and, one imagines, the library.*

When did a book first echo for you?

I can't remember the first, it's just how I read. I like to look for similarities in everything.

What were you doing when you thought of Small Demons?

In 2005 I was working at Yahoo, and reading *Total Chaos* by Jean-Claude Izzo, the first book in the Marseilles trilogy. I rarely took vacations, but when I did I planned them abruptly, and I went to Paris. I listened music that had been in the book, and tried a drink Izzo wrote about. It was so profound I switched my itinerary to go to Marseilles for the full experience.

What does Small Demons do?

We're a visual index for all the interesting details inside of books, specifically the people, places and things. We're a way you can go deeper into a book you really love and share elements you're interested in. Right now, the way we discover things is so dominated by word-of-mouth or retail recommendations. We want to open discovery to a different set of inputs, inputs that come from books and the characters in books.

Why the name?

In our space, the space of vast libraries, it is hard not to talk about Borges, and he inspired me. In his story, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Borges writes, "The history of the universe... is the handwriting produced by a Minor god in order to communicate with a Demon." The demon is the passion of the writer to write and the reader to read.

What do you see Small Demons becoming?

We will be coming to connect books with music, films, food, move into other languages. Right now we will be adding content fairly quickly and soon there will be a user-generated content component.

Culture has a cadence, a rhythm, based on the way works connect to each other. We want to

reconstitute as much of that rhythm as possible to make it easy to find works of culture and how they relate to each other.

You can watch their demo video here:

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