

The Bending Machine.

The penguin looked out the window of the plane as it taxied to a halt. Sorry. Not the penguin. Silly me, penguins can't fly - I meant the bear.

Bear hadn't been to Japan before and, despite the lack of legroom and sparse movie selection on the 12 hour flight, he was very excited by the whole affair.

He watched the ground crew bow toward the plane as it reached the terminal. Touched by this sight, Bear shed a tear.

Bowing is traditional in Japan. As is giving and receiving money with both paws, not waving your chopsticks around at the dinner table, and having a jet of water squirted up your ass by talking toilet - although mechanical chatter is not confined to the bathroom.

'Please enter your selection'. Liberated from office corridors, vending machines enjoy a popularity in Japan proportional to their advanced functionality. Gone are the days of digging through lint filled pockets to recover the correct coinage - these wonders accept credit cards - and the clunky buttons have been replaced by a touch pad which the voice prompts you to use.

Then the show begins, and a robotic arm worthy of Terminator performs a magnificent ballet, lifting your Snickers bar from its shelf.

The last time Bear used a vending machine, a spiral had grudgingly propelled his snack toward him, stopping just shy of the point where gravity could take over, and he found himself pounding the glass until selection J16 fell gracelessly to the floor.

But that was then. Now, a tray magically appears, and as Terminator retracts its arm, the tray slowly lower- what? No! Wait!

In front of Bear's disbelieving eyes, the tray lowered, mockingly, all the way down past his furry knees.

'This machine can talk and has a god damn arm but I still have to bend down to the floor to get my candy?' roared Bear. Yes Mr. Bear, indeed you do. A clear message from the machines: We are your masters - bow down before us.

Arigato.

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Go to your local shop. Buy a Snickers bar. Watch as the cashier throws it to the floor: 'Welcome to the future, there's your fucking chocolate. Have a nice day.'

(Remember to pay with both hands.)

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