



Plant Collectors' Notebook

採集人の野帳 1

Author: Ejan **Illustrator:** Ejan **Publisher:** Gaea Books

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Award: 2022 The 46th Golden Tripod Awards, Recommended Excellent Publication

BFT2.0 Translator: Mike Fu

The unruly son of a famous apothecary accidentally burns down the family home, destroying precious plant samples collected by visiting researchers. As punishment, he is sent to work with them, embarking on a passionate journey of discovery and plants.

In early 20th-century Taiwan, botanists from the local herbarium gather with a renowned apothecary to share their latest discoveries. While they chat over drinks, Liang-Shan, the rebellious son of the host, accidentally ignites a fire that burns down part of the family shophouse and destroys valuable specimens collected by the botanists. To make amends, the apothecary sends Liang-Shan to work in the herbarium.

Unhappy with his situation, Liang-Shan botches a series of tedious tasks. But soon, the researchers discover that this apparent good-for-nothing has an uncanny talent for identifying and collecting plant species. Over the course of his penance at the herbarium, Liang-Shan's cynical and impulsive nature raises the question: will he prove to be more of a help or a hindrance?

In the 1920s, the imperial government of Japan commissioned numerous studies of Taiwan's native plants and funded the construction of the herbarium featured in this graphic novel. Located within the Taipei Botanical Garden, the herbarium continues its work to this day, housing Taiwan's oldest and largest collection of botanical specimens. Drawing upon meticulous consultations with researchers at the Taiwan Forestry Research Institute, author and artist Ejan has crafted a remarkable account of individuals passionate about plants and plant-collecting.



Ejan

Ejan is a freelance creator known for comic versions of *Close Your Eyes Before It's Dark*, *Dark Forest Reading Club*, and *Plant Collectors' Notebook*. *Close Your Eyes Before It's Dark* won the Best Newcomer Award at the Golden Comic Awards in 2018. *Plant Collectors' Notebook Vol. 2* was selected as an Excellent Publication at the 46th Golden Tripod Awards in 2022. Ejan has received the Cultural Content Fund's Taiwan Original Comic Production Project grant for 2022.

Savoring the Inconspicuous

Written by Itzel Hsu

(originally published at Readmoo)

Translated by Joel Martinsen

Plants are food, neighbors, and the most intimate of strangers. Perhaps because of their everyday relevance, botany-related writing has flourished in recent years. Riding this wave of interest in native flora is *Plant Collectors' Notebook*, a graphic novel set during the Japanese colonial period that follows the lives of plant collectors. Despite its title suggesting a guidebook, this is a narrative-driven story that delves into the lives of three characters, each with their own dreams and scars. As they gather plants and produce specimens, they encounter new experiences and learn life-changing lessons.

Hsu Liang-Shan is the only son of a

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pharmacist who uses herbs and plants to treat illness. After his younger sister succumbs to a heart ailment despite herbal treatments, Liang-Shan is left heartbroken and loses faith in the healing power of plants. However, as he starts to work at the Taipei Herbarium, he gradually comes to appreciate herbal knowledge, discovering that plants have far more uses than he ever imagined. This newfound understanding helps him to grieve the loss of

his sister.

Liang-Shan's supervisor, Matsuo Haku, a botanical research assistant, is swift and decisive in his work. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that his dedication stems from a deep-seated sense of

inferiority and worthlessness caused by his frail health. Yet, his passion for plants quietly inspires those around him.

Wu-Tsao, an orphan raised in a village of mountain bandits, joins the Herbarium team shortly after Liang-Shan. Though illiterate, she is exceptionally skilled with her hands. She hopes that learning about botany will help her confront the lingering trauma of being abandoned as a child. Whether it's Liang-Shan helping her adapt to a new way of life or Haku teaching her to read, Wu-Tsao is constantly discovering new things.

To write and illustrate this book, the author and artist Ejan consulted extensively with botanists and historians. Each drawing, from branches to leaves, was reviewed by experts. For example, in the chapter introducing Wu-Tsao, the bandits not only rob travelers but also cultivate poppies and refine opium in a concealed encampment.

The choice to depict specific plants for these criminal activities was made with careful consideration of their plausibility during the Japanese colonial period. This underscores the meticulous character of Ejan's work.

As Ejan put it, "The name of a plant collector doesn't go down in history like a botanist's, but their work forms the foundation for all subsequent research." Her collaboration with botanists and historians is, in itself, a subtle tribute to that unrecognized labor. Perhaps this is what *Plant Collectors' Notebook* shares with its readers: just as its protagonists quietly support botanical research—and plants silently sustain human life—ordinary people like us contribute to the day-to-day functioning of the world.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.



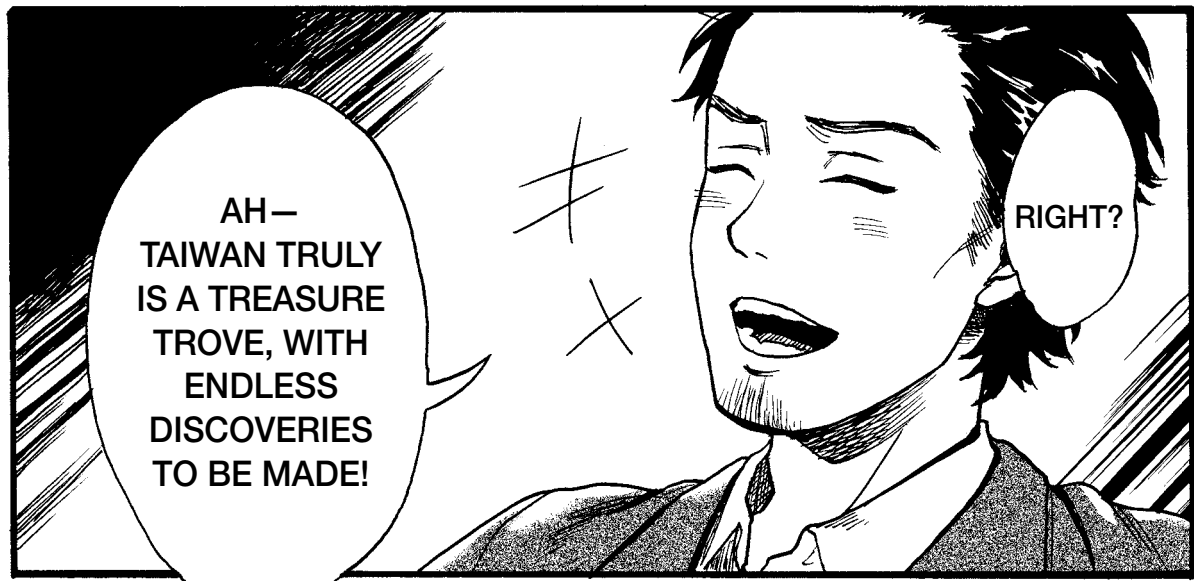
AH, NO KIDDING! YOU HAVE SUCH A SHARP EYE.

BESIDES, THE TEPALS ARE SHINY AND SMOOTH. I DARESAY THIS IS A NEW SPECIES!

NO, NO, THERE ARE AXILLARY BUDS ON THE INFLORESCENCE; IT'S NOT ACROGYNOUS.

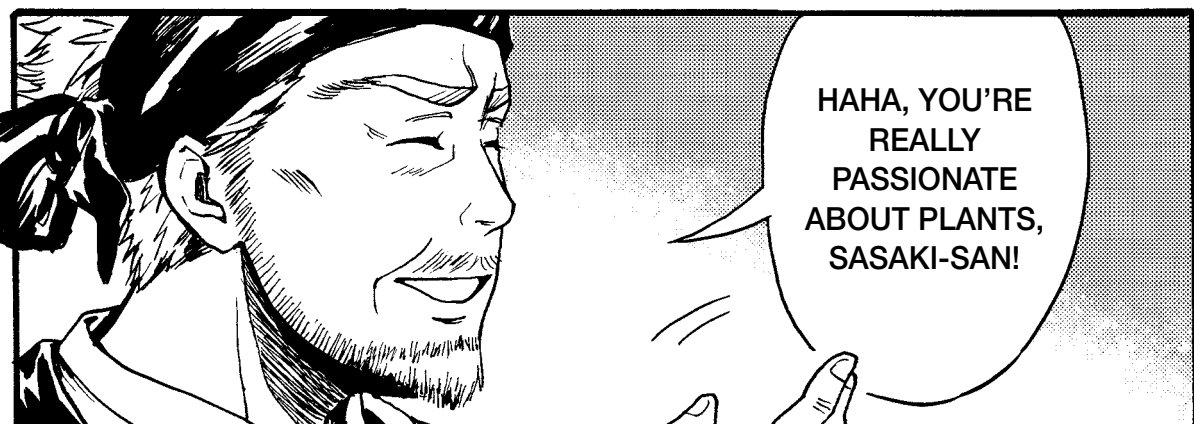
BUT DON'T THE SPOTS ON THE PETALS LOOK FAMILIAR?

IS THIS AN UNKNOWN SPECIES?



AH— TAIWAN TRULY IS A TREASURE TROVE, WITH ENDLESS DISCOVERIES TO BE MADE!

RIGHT?



HAHA, YOU'RE REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT PLANTS, SASAKI-SAN!



REALLY? LET'S HAVE A LOOK-SEE!

THIS IS THE NEW PLANT SPECIES I FOUND ON THE MOUNTAIN THIS TIME!



HOW WONDERFUL—

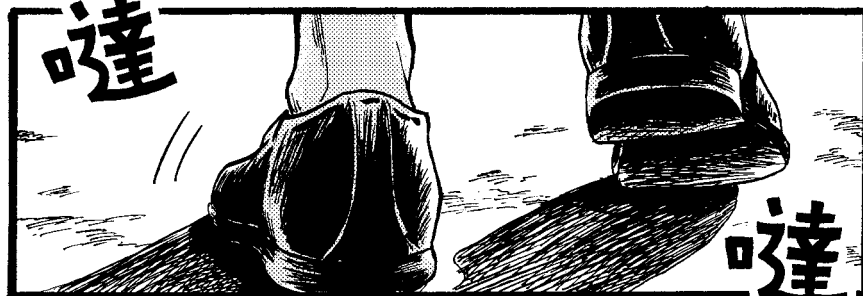
GOING FORWARD, IT'LL BE MUCH EASIER FOR US TO LOOK UP THE COMMON NAMES OF HERBS.

YES.

WOW! IT'S REALLY BECOME A BOOK.



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WHY DON'T WE HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT IF YOU TWO HAVE TIME? THERE'S A NEW RESTAURANT NEARBY THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE PRETTY GOOD.

SURE, SO LONG AS WE CAN TROUBLE YOU TO LEAD THE WAY.



THEN LET'S BE OFF!

ALRIGHT.

喀



WELL!

I JUST COULDN'T WAIT TO SHARE THE NEWS WITH SOMEONE!

LOOK AT YOURSELF,

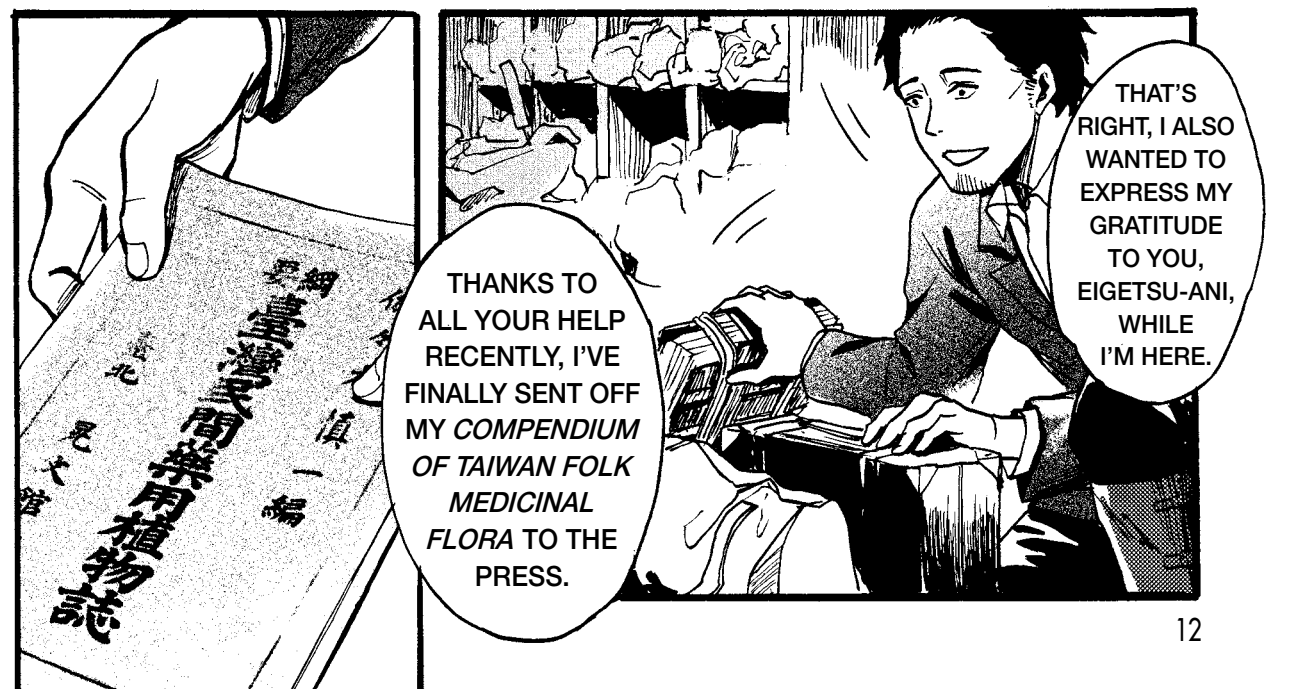
RUSHING OVER TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS BEFORE YOU'VE EVEN UNPACKED!



SHINICHI-SAN.



OH!



THANKS TO ALL YOUR HELP RECENTLY, I'VE FINALLY SENT OFF MY COMPENDIUM OF TAIWAN FOLK MEDICINAL FLORA TO THE PRESS.

THAT'S RIGHT, I ALSO WANTED TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO YOU, EIGETSU-ANI, WHILE I'M HERE.

