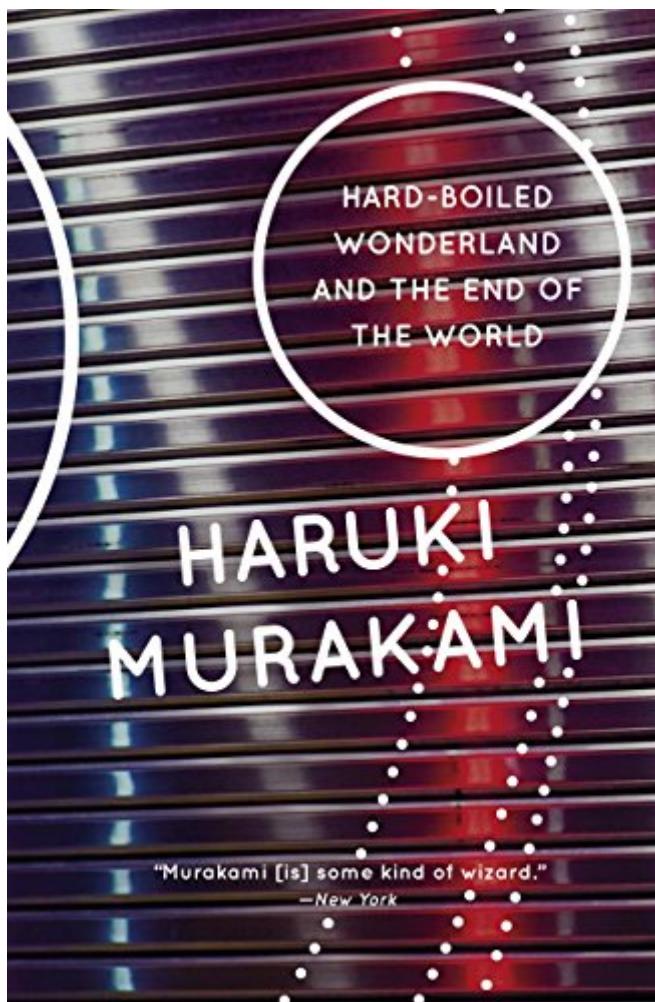


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Hard-Boiled Wonderland And The End Of The World (Vintage International)



Synopsis

In this hyperkinetic and relentlessly inventive novel, Japanâ™s most popular (and controversial) fiction writer hurtles into the consciousness of the West. Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World draws readers into a narrative particle accelerator in which a split-brained data processor, a deranged scientist, his shockingly undemure granddaughter, Lauren Bacall, Bob Dylan, and various thugs, librarians, and subterranean monsters collide to dazzling effect. What emerges is simultaneously cooler than zero and unaffectedly affecting, a hilariously funny and deeply serious meditation on the nature and uses of the mind. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World follows two distinct and parallel storylines, both with unnamed narrators who might or might not be the same person. In the first storyline, the narrator is a "Calcute", a computer specialist working for "The System" to protect data against the "Semiotecs", an organization of powerful black market information pirates. Called down into the sewers below Tokyo against regulations and against the law, the main character agrees to "shuffle", or encode the work of a nutty professor who says he has discovered a way to make bones talk! His life might be in danger though because all the major powers want a piece of this new technology.

This plotline alternates chapters with a more fantasy type idyll about a town surrounded by an impenetrable and unscalable wall, in which the narrator tries to figure out who he is and how he came there. There are other inhabitants but all their comments are pretty cryptic. But there's some bizarre stuff going on. For example, there are unicorns grazing around the town, you lose your shadow, and the narrator is given the job of "reading dreams" from the skulls of strange beasts! He must set about figuring out how to escape unless he wants to be trapped there forever. This novel was weird but refreshing. I thought it was pretty clever of Murakami to almost write two books in one, the first being a cyberpunk adventure and the other a strange surreal fantasy. But it worked. Don't worry, these two stories within a novel do have a purpose in being joined together, even though you might not understand all the "physics" talk when explanations are given. You get the gist of it. Harold Bloom once said that what gives a novel its lasting greatness is that it has to be strange.

At some point along the way on your journey through "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World"--in my case, not until I had read the last page and closed the book--it may occur to you, Why, this isn't a modernistic, subversive, radical treatise on the ravages of contemporary society and the havoc that technology has wreaked on us, it's just an old-fashioned book about aging! The two halves of the book--"Hard-Boiled Wonderland" and "The End of the World"--represent, to my mind, youth and adulthood, respectively, and the protagonist--as well as the author--appear to find themselves poised in thirtysomething limbo, trying to decide what they want their lives to be like from hereon out. "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" certainly seems to be the more fun of the two worlds--exotic women, delicious food, cool cars, high-paced city living, and infinite possibilities for what career to choose, which woman to settle down with, and what town to live in. But Wonderland is certainly more dangerous--all that high-tech mafia business, gruesome violence, flesh-eating monsters, broken-into apartments, splitting headaches, and hangovers from those crazy nights drowning your confusion in whiskey. It's enough to make a thirtysomething guy long for a little peace and comfort. That's where "The End of the World" comes in. End of the World is everything Wonderland is not: one monogamous partner, gruel for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, no mode of transportation other than your own two feet, and nothing more exciting to do than stare off at the mountains or the smoke stack from the Power Plant or wait for the herd of beasts to come trampling through the town every evening.

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