



Salmonella Men on Planet Porno (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Yasutaka Tsutsui

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An irresistible mix of imagination, satire, and humor, these stories by acclaimed Japanese author Yasutaka Tsutsui imagine the consequences of a world where the fantastic and the mundane collide.

The opening story, “The Dabba Dabba Tree,” details the hilarious side effects of a small conical tree that, when placed at the foot of one’s bed, creates erotic dreams. In “Commuter Army,” a sly commentary on the ludicrousness of war, a weapons supplier becomes an unwilling conscript in a war zone. “The World is Tilting” imagines a floating city that slowly begins to sink on one side, causing its citizens to reorient their daily lives to preserve a semblance of normality. And in the title story, we see how obscenely absurd the environment on Planet Porno appears to a group of scientists. The stories in **Salmonella Men on Planet Porno** winningly combine madcap hilarity and a sharp eye toward the insanities of contemporary life.

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Salmonella Men on Planet Porno (Vintage Contemporaries) By Yasutaka Tsutsui Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #539801 in Books
- Published on: 2010-01-12
- Released on: 2010-01-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .70" w x 5.20" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 270 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Marvelously wacky and psychologically insightful. . . . Tsutsui’s fabulously morbid sense of humor, his obsessiveness and his wit make this collection sufficiently entertaining and disturbing to warrant our attention, especially today when the world as we know it has indeed tilted into the fantastical.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Fans of Haruki Murakami will relish this delightful collection. . . . A strange, magical journey.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Darkly funny and still fresh and relevant.”

—*Los Angeles Times*

“Each and every story sizzles with energy, teems with issues and sweeps you happily along into the fantasy. . . . Tsutsui is at his best when juggling all the apples, devising entertaining, whimsical worlds and scenarios that camouflage scathing criticism. . . . The collection unabashedly romps in the sexual facets of modern humanity and culture. But Tsutsui’s work does so much more, sometimes brilliantly, often hilariously, always fantastically, never bound by reality or convention.”

—*The Miami Herald*

“For once, a book that merits its wacky title, this collection . . . playfully skips across the conventions of both sci-fi and slapstick. . . . [In it,] the sense of a world bordering on paranoid hysteria is as strong as ever.”

—BBC

“Insightful and funny. . . . [Tsutsui’s] dark satire should find a loyal audience in the states.”

—*Rocky Mountain News*

“Memorable. . . . Quirky and entertaining. . . . Tsutsui shrewdly reveals the hairline stresses, lusts, and insanities that no society can ever completely wall in.”

—*The Harvard Crimson*

“Tsutsui is a shrewd satirist. . . . Potent are those stories where the author eschews genre pyrotechnics and reveals the strangeness and horror of the ordinary.”

—*The Review of Contemporary Fiction*

“Off-kilter and marvelously entertaining. In Tsutsui’s world, the fantastic and the mundane collide, throwing the lives of ordinary men and women into disarray. . . . Just what the doctor ordered.”

—*Tucson Citizen*

“This collection is not for the faint of heart; you must be open to receive its infinite joys.”

—*The Honolulu Advertiser*

“[These] stories show [Tsutsui’s] trademark fearlessness in the face of taboos; war, sex, the media, and the sheep-like mentality of groups are all fair game.”

—*Theme Magazine*

“Imagine a cross between the music group the B-52s, Thomas Pynchon’s *V.*, Ryu Murakami’s *Coin Locker Babies*, and James Turner’s graphic novel *Nil: A Land Beyond Belief*, throw in a good dose of sf tropes and bitter social satire, and you’ll start to get a good idea of what’s in store for you in this collection of 13 imaginative stories from one of Japan’s best-known sf writers.”

—*School Library Journal*

“With a sharp eye towards the insanities of contemporary life, Tsutsui crafts an irresistible mix of imagination, satiric fantasy, and truly madcap hilarity.”

—*Bookmarks Magazine*

“Imaginative, farcical stories that sometimes amuse and sometimes perplex. . . . [They] focus on the comic follies and irrational whims of the human race.”

—*ArmchairInterviews.com*

“Weird, wonderful and wild. . . . Sparkles with biting pieces of social and political satire that reveal a formidable talent. . . . Tsutsui’s voice is witty and quirky, seducing us to suspend our disbelief for even the most fanciful narrative.”

—*BookPage*

About the Author

One of modern Japan's most renowned writers, **Yasutaka Tsutsui** has won the Tanizaki Prize, the Kawabata Prize, and several other awards. He was decorated as a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. He lives in Japan.

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The Dabba Dabba Tree

My father came up from the country carrying a curiously shaped bonsai tree.

“This here’s a Dabba Dabba Tree,” he announced, showing it to me and my wife. “It’s a special kind of cedar, see.”

“My, what an odd-looking thing,” said my wife, examining it with a look of puzzlement.

The tree was about eight inches tall. It was thicker at the base but tapered off towards the top, where the foliage was more sparse. Standing upright, the trunk formed a perfect cone.

“Yes, and what an odd name,” I added, watching my father’s expression. Perhaps it would shed some light on his reason for bringing the tree.

“Well, it’s not just the name that’s odd,” he said, narrowing his eyes. “If you put this Dabba Dabba Tree in your bedroom at night, you’ll have fruity dreams till morning comes!”

“Gosh! I wonder what he means,” said my wife.

I whispered in her ear. “Erotic dreams, of course.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, blushing.

My father gave her a lewd look and continued. “You’ve been married five years but still ain’t had kids. That’s why I brought you the tree. Put it in your bedroom tonight – you’re sure to have some cracking dreams. Go on, have it! It’s no good for an old codger like me! Kekekekekeh!” he chuckled like some weird bird, before setting off back to the country.

That night, we took the Dabba Dabba Tree into our bedroom and placed it at the foot of our double bed. Yes, we were still using a double bed even after five years of marriage. Well, our bedroom was rather small. There wasn’t enough room for two beds.

“Good night, then.”

“Yes, good night.”

We dived under the sheets, excitedly turned our backs on each other, and concentrated on getting to sleep. At times like this, you want to be the first to drop off. Otherwise, the sound of your partner’s breathing gets on your nerves and keeps you awake. So much the worse if you know she’s having an erotic dream. And worse still if she starts talking in her sleep.

Luckily, I nodded off immediately. And I started dreaming. I dreamt I was in my bedroom, sleeping in my double bed with my wife.

“Yes! A dream!”

I sat up. My wife was slumbering peacefully next to me, completely naked. She can’t sleep any other way. I turned my head in puzzlement.

“Great. What’s erotic about that?!”

If I made love to her after all this time, there wouldn’t be anything erotic about it at all. It would just be dull old reality – whether she was naked or not.

“Well, if this is an erotic dream, I’d better do something erotic!”

I got out of bed and put my shirt and trousers on. Then I slipped on some sandals and went outside. To find a woman worthy of sharing my erotic dream, I’d have to go to the nightlife district. I walked along a dark side-road, then turned into a major thoroughfare. The street shone as bright as day, thanks to the bars and restaurants on either side. There were people everywhere.

“Where are all the tasty women then?” I grumbled. I was feeling rather tired after walking two or three blocks. Having an erotic dream clearly demanded a certain amount of perseverance. I would spot a woman who looked promising from a distance but who, on closer inspection, turned out to be a wrinkled old hag. Or a tall, slender girl with a great figure would be walking in front of me. I’d hurry to catch her up, only to find that she was a complete dog to look at. I’m not usually picky about my women. But now that I was having this erotic dream, it would have been pointless to go for someone I didn’t fancy. I walked on.

Then a girl stepped out of a streetside café. She was dressed in a dark-brown suit and looked like a college student. Wearing little make-up besides her lipstick, she had pale skin, large eyes and a pretty face.

“YES!!!” I exclaimed, blocking her way.

“Can I help you?” she asked, looking me up and down.

“Well, actually...” I replied falteringly, wondering how to explain. “Actually, I’ve got this Dabba Dabba Tree, you see, and...”

“Oh no. Not you as well!” she giggled. Then her expression changed to a frown. “You’re the fourth one tonight. You’re going to say you’re having an erotic dream because of this ‘Dabba Dabba Tree’, and you want to have sex with me. Right?”

“What? You mean there are others?” I replied, somewhat surprised. But after all, it was just a dream. Who cared? “I mean, er, that’s right. I really want to have sex with you.”

“In your dreams!” she said with an ironic smile, shaking her head. “I’ve said the same to all of them. This might be a dream for you, but for me, it’s reality! And anyway, I’m still a virgin. I refuse to lose my virginity just to fulfil someone else’s dream!”

What was she on about? Well, it didn’t matter. It was just a dream.

“Those other three must have been weak-willed. Spineless. And maybe they didn’t want you enough anyway,” I said. “But I won’t give up so easily, d’you hear? This may well be reality for you, but for me it’s just a dream. So I don’t care what happens! And anyway, I fancy you. I fancy you like mad, so I’m going to make love to you. And if you say no, I’ll just have to force myself on you, right here and now.”

“What, here in the street?”

“That’s right. I don’t care who sees us, or where we are. I’m going to pounce on you, and rip that tasteful, well-tailored darkbrown suit off your body, a-a-and then, and then I’m going to pull off your bra, and – and—”

“All right, keep your hair on! Look, you’re slobbering!”

“Oh.” I quickly wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. “And then, and then, I’m going to pull down your panties—”

“Er – I’m wearing tights.”

“I’m going to pull down your panties together with your tights, then I’m going to grab hold of you, throw you onto the pavement and ravish your body by force. Well, you say you’re a virgin, and that’s a bit unfortunate for you. But hey, it’s a dream, it doesn’t matter! I’ll ravish you, and then—”

“The police might see us.”

“I don’t care. If they come to arrest me, I’ll just shout out at the top of my voice. Then I’ll wake up. Mind you... This is reality for you, isn’t it. Your clothes will be in a mess and you’ll be stark naked. You can’t go home like that. What’ll you do?”

“I don’t know. What do you think?”

“Why don’t we find a hotel? I don’t really want to rape you here. If the police came, they’d only spoil it.”

She hesitated for a moment, observing me with a sideways look. "All right," she answered eventually, with some reluctance. "I'll go with you. After all, it seems I only exist inside your dream. I can't just ignore you, can I."

So we turned off into a side road and wandered around the back streets looking for a discreet hotel. There were none to be found.

"Where are they all?!"

I was getting irritated. If we didn't do it quickly, I might wake up.

"We might find one if we went away from town," she said. "There's a hotel right next to my college."

We went up a hill and at last found a hotel. We entered the lobby and stood at the reception desk. A middle-aged woman with thinning hair came out. "I'm afraid we're full," she said. "But if you'd like to wait five or ten minutes, there's sure to be a vacancy." I couldn't be bothered to walk around looking for another hotel, so we went into the little waiting room next to the lobby. There, we sat on a sofa waiting for a vacancy. We were alone.

"Are you married?" the girl asked me.

"Yes."

"Really? And what's your wife doing now?"

"Sleeping next to me in our bedroom."

"You mean you're having a dream like this while your wife's sleeping next to you? What sort of a husband are you?!"

"And how do I know what she's dreaming about?!"

As I said that, another couple came into the hotel. I could hear the receptionist repeating the same words in the lobby.

"I'm afraid we're full. But if you'd like to wait five or ten minutes, there's sure to be a vacancy."

As the couple came into the waiting room, I let out a cry. When they saw me, they stopped in their tracks. The woman was my wife. Her partner was our neighbour, Mr Miyamoto.

"Well, well!" said Miyamoto obsequiously. They sat on the sofa opposite us. Chubby Miyamoto looked down at the floor in embarrassment.

"Well, aren't you having a good time!" my wife said sarcastically.

"Yes, and you too!" I replied. I was going to ask how long she'd been seeing Miyamoto. But it was just a dream. It would be pointless to ask.

"She's pretty," said my wife, indicating my partner with her chin.

“Is this your wife?!” the girl said, hurrying to her feet. “Pleased to meet you. I’m, er—”

“Don’t be stupid. You don’t have to say anything.” I tugged her back down by the edge of her skirt.

The receptionist came in. “We have a vacancy now,” she announced. “This way, please.”

“Well, excuse us,” I said to Miyamoto and my wife as we got up to go.

The receptionist led us to our room. As soon as she’d left, I jumped on the girl, yelling “Come on, then!”

“Don’t!” she shrieked. She evaded me and stood at the corner of the bed. “That woman will be back with the tea soon.”

“You seem to know a lot about it!” She blushed.

“Anyway, I can’t wait for all that. Let her come in!”

The girl eluded me again.

As we continued our chasing game, the receptionist came in with the tea. “The bath water should be hot now, so please feel free. Good evening.” And with that she left the room.

“I want to have a bath,” said the girl.

“I can’t wait for that,” I moaned. “Can’t you have one later?”

“Certainly not! I’ve been perspiring with all that walking around. You should have one after me, too. Look at your face. It’s covered in sweat.”

“No! I can’t wait any longer!” I said, lunging at her.

She darted into the bathroom and closed the door behind her.

“All right, I’ll come in with you!” I called out as I banged on the door.

“No!” she shouted. “I’d be too embarrassed.”

There was nothing for it. I took off my clothes and sat on the edge of the bed, naked, waiting for her to reappear. I was getting more and more irritated. This dream seemed awfully close to reality. I even started to think it might be reality. So, as a test, I dug my fingernail into my right cheek.

If this was a dream, it wouldn’t hurt.

It hurt.

It hurt so much that it woke me up. In my sleep, I’d dug my nail hard into my cheek.

“DAMN!!!”

My wife was still sleeping peacefully, contentedly next to me. In my rage, I jumped up and punched her on

the arm.

“Ow! OW!! What are you doing?!” She sprang up, startled. “Just when I was getting to the good bit!”

“Huh! You think I’m going to let you have all the fun? I’m going to go back to sleep and have the time of my life!”

“You think you’re the only one? Watch me!”

We turned our backs on each other with huffs of indignation, and concentrated on getting back to sleep. Luckily, I dozed off in an instant. And I started to dream. I dreamt I was sleeping in our bed at home.

“Yesss!! A dream!”

I slipped out of the sheets. My wife was sleeping naked on the bed.

“Right! Let’s get back to that hotel!”

I hunted around the bed looking for my clothes. But my shirt and trousers were nowhere to be seen. Of course they weren’t. I’d taken them off in the hotel.

I quickly looked around for another pair of trousers. But couldn’t even wait that long. And anyway, it was only a dream.

“All right! I’ll go as I am!”

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Catherine Hershey:

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