



Phantasm Japan: Fantasies Light and Dark, From and About Japan

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From the editors of the acclaimed science fiction anthology *The Future Is Japanese* comes *Phantasm Japan*, which collects new stories—from the best Western and Japanese fantasists—that explore new worlds, ancient worlds, and this world.

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From Reader Review Phantasm Japan: Fantasies Light and Dark, From and About Japan for online ebook

Jane says

An unusual collection of stories ranging from traditional story through to science fiction to weird tales. I found something to admire in nearly all of them, although the longest story - Sisyphean - required too much mental work and just went over my head in the end. Stand outs for me were Girl, I love you, He dreads the cold, From the nothing with love, and the Street of Fruiting Bodies.

emil says

ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL

Mills College Library says

Fiction H1499 2014

Katie says

It was a good mix of stories. I enjoyed them.

Pearse Anderson says

Well, I didn't quite finish this. I was in the middle of Sisyphean and realized that the only point of reading more would be to tell myself that I finished it. And if that's the only thing keeping you going you should probably stop. So I did. This was such a mixed collection. On one hand there were some great stories, like Scissors or Claws, and Holes and The Street of Fruiting Bodies, but so much else was terrible. Stories that fell out of place, were so full of abstractions I didn't understand, lacked either weird Japan or plot development, many times both. It felt like a collection from and by authors who had a cool idea and couldn't execute it well. From the Japanese lit I've read it's full of encounters with spirits, surreal happenings, and conclusions I don't understand or appreciate. So, whether it be that stupid weeaboo story or that pretty good but out of place James Bond story, get it together collection. 5/10? Maybe 4.

Kalin says

Diverse, surprising (which shouldn't be surprising in itself ;) and highly recommended--I'd say more than The Future is Japanese.

In my reading notes below, I've boldfaced the stories that took my breath away.

~ Gary A. Braunbeck's "Shikata Ga Nai: The Bag Lady's Tale" made me think of *The Man from Earth* ... but in a more phantasmagorical format. The mythical element was downright scary: just think about all those children and their piles of pebbles

~ Yusaku Kitano's "Scissors or Claws, and Holes," the first Japanese entry in the anthology, cranks up the level of weirdness to eleven. It's gross, transgressive, body-horror, but also fascinating with its sheer alienness. Would you ever be able to do the V sign for another photo? Without shivering, too?

The Japanesees are *not* us. ;)

~ Lauren Naturale's "Her Last Appearance" is a complex story, and not one you read to be lulled to sleep ... how many pieces of the puzzle have I missed? Still, there's beauty in it simple enough for a sleep-deprived brain not to miss:

You, Namiko, in your men's trousers, in the slouchy hat that hides your small pointed chin and ghost-nose, are in love with money. But so is everyone else who loves the city in the mornings. The woman who walks the city at night is searching for trouble, but the woman who walks at daybreak has a fortune to make.

It went on, one of those friendships that seems almost real until the first time you kiss, drunk, in a noodle shop in Chinatown after your second viewing of *The Resurrected Corpse*, and think, What am I getting myself into? Nothing wrong with lying to a girl, but it's better to avoid kissing the kind of girl who only likes you because you're a liar, else you end up growing nails for a week just to scratch her properly, which is messy and not your idea of a good time. "I like my sex a little less kabuki," you tell her, and she avoids you for a month.

"Where are you actually from?" Shizuko asks. You say, "The land of the dead. Isn't it obvious?"

(...)

Here's a story: You were in love for a very long time with a woman who loved you back. A little while after she died, you started seeing ghosts. But you've never seen *her* ghost, so you wander through your days half alive and half dead, searching through a world of shadows, and you are always sleepwalking.

See? We've all been there.

We have, haven't we? Aren't we going there even now?

~ Nadia Bulkin's "Girl, I Love You" is raw, brutal and beautiful--one of those stories where the real is much more horrific than the fantastic:

“You’re not taking your future seriously, Michi,” Miss Tomoe said after class. She was unmarried, childless, tending to her parents, forever trapped in high school. I couldn’t imagine anything worse. “It’s so important that you don’t slip up now.”

(...)

“I don’t know,” I said. “Why do you pop antidepressants between classes?”

Miss Tomoe’s platelike facade shattered, and she burst into tears right there at the desk, surrounded by all her little beakers. Not long after that, she was fired for forcing a failing student to drink hydrochloric acid. She’d poured herself a beaker too, saying “Here’s to failure!” The student spat his out; Miss Tomoe finished hers.

~ Quentin S. Crisp's "The Last Packet of Tea" is the first unabashedly literary piece in the anthology:

There was something that immediately gave a faint glow in his tactile consciousness—a glow of the kind that suggests “second skin” or “second nature.” It was his thermal underwear. Obvious enough to be bathetic—yet true. “Long johns” was the term he preferred. It had that almost folkloric resonance, that sense of a jocular familiarity with death, also to be found in expressions like “Davy Jones’s locker.” His long johns were undoubtedly literature—they had all the qualifications. They brought him warmth in the cold. They were a private concern. They bore with his lack of cleanliness in philosophical equanimity, following the shape of his legs in a way that was friendly, unobtrusive, and showed the flexibility necessary for complete realism. And though they were gray and their cut was not dashing, in their everydayness there was a kind of eremitism, in their eremitism a kind of openness, in their openness a kind of beauty, in their beauty a kind of romance.

It resonates with any paladin publisher's wet dreams and/or pet harangues (tee-hee):

I believe that, from the wreckage of our current age, we have the chance to build a new citadel of literature and a new literary culture to bring it to life—a literary culture as it always should have been, in which both quality and novelty are valued, where writers are paid, and where books are not produced and distributed according to the demands of the least literate, but under the guidance of the most.

And it gives food for thought:

“Have you started on a story?” Fletch asked after examining the letter and the guidelines.

“No.”

“I think you should. Don’t you want to?”

“Yes, I do. The problem is that I’m too old. I don’t mean for writing. But for fiction I am.”

“How can you be too old?”

“I think fiction is about suspense and possibility. That is, it is especially meaningful to those in the middle of life, but at least needs a future too large to be contained within the mental field of

vision. One writes fiction in order to have a dialogue with life, in the hope that this dialogue will deepen future possibilities. Simply put, one writes fiction with the intention of living it, or at least the values and aesthetics it embodies.

“I no longer have a future to dream about or to dream with. The horizon is narrowing as it converges on the exit from existence.”

Hmm ... does it really get like that? Anyone cares to comment?

The ending was particularly ethereal, almost elusive. Definitely worth rereading.

~ The Japanese keep surprising me. This time it's Project Itoh, with "**From the Nothing, with Love**":

I am a book. A text, unfolding continuously.

Still, this text that you—I have no way of knowing who *you* are—have found, and are reading and deriving meaning from, is not me. This text I am writing is separate from me as I unfold continuously, though it is part of me. I suppose that to you this is just a story, but if you think of me as a text writing a text, it would not be altogether wrong to regard me as a frame story. Yes, like the minstrel recounting the Canterbury Tales.

Until very recently I thought I existed only as my own story. I might be a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy, but I was still me. But this was nothing more than blind faith, childish and naive.

Strictly speaking, I am not myself. This simple fact was brought to my attention only recently.

It's funny how a text of this type makes fun of postmodernist-slash-deconstructionist architecture.

Then it digs deep into contemporary brain science (you thought it was a fantasy? ;), summing up some of the astounding findings I've already seen in David Eagleman's *Incognito*:

“Well, suppose I slap your face. You feel pain, but the sensation isn't instantaneous. It takes about half a second—it depends on the part of the body, of course—for a pain stimulus to transit the nerves and reach the brain. But it *seems* as if you feel pain at the precise instant your cheek is slapped. You 'feel' that the slap and the pain occur simultaneously. But that's only because your brain is editing the timeline, so you perceive the slap only after your brain registers the pain. The brain synchronizes the awareness of one moment to another awareness of a different moment. That means the 'present' we perceive is not the present at all. The brain processes vision, taste, touch, pain all at different speeds. Just like a computer, the brain requires finite amounts of time to create a unified awareness out of the sensations impinging on us from moment to moment. It takes these disjointed inputs and creates the illusion of 'now,' the illusion of the present moment. This function is an aspect of what we call consciousness.”

“Then consciousness is simply a dream? What we experience is just the movements of a body being manipulated like a puppet?”

“No, of course not. Consciousness can make judgments and control behavior. But quite a bit of what we do requires no consciousness at all. Human beings aren't aware of everything they do.

A finger striking a keyboard. Each footstep along a road. These are just examples, but a lot of research is going into studying complex activities that aren't completely mediated by conscious awareness, like playing a musical instrument."

And all the time it waxes philosophical, in ways large and small, but always bringing such refreshing clarity:

"My husband passed away years ago, but still, I suppose we were together too long. It's as if I've taken on the pattern of his life and his habits. Not in everything, but in some things very much."

The woman gazed at me serenely. Love, we used to call it. It starts as love, that much is certain. It changes with years; we lose the sexual passion and the mad craving to fill up the emptiness. Love becomes an algorithm for living in synchrony with another person. The final destination, love's ultimate consummation, is the assimilation of another person's life into one's own. The life of one's beloved become a template to transcribe into oneself.

"In a sense, your husband is still alive, then. Alive in you."

She nodded and smiled. There was nothing hidden in that smile, no trace of loneliness. An ordinary smile, and therefore extraordinarily beautiful.

"His body has gone ahead, but he still lives in me. Karmic retribution, isn't it? That's why I come here, to complain. The first Sunday of every month, after the service is over, I come and tell him, 'Since you've seen fit to leave me on my own, one would think you'd give me a little more freedom.' "

~ To compensate for the mostly cerebral approach of "From the Nothing...", Tim Pratt's **"Those Who Hunt Monster Hunters"** stirred my emotions on such a visceral level that I'll leave the excerpts speak for themselves:

Most of all she'd been desperate for a night away from the endless psychodrama of her housemate and his girlfriend—it was hard to decide if their loud arguing or their louder reconciliation sex annoyed her more, but it didn't much matter because she got to hear both a few times a week.

"I love Asian girls," the monster hunter tells me on our date. "They're so much better than white girls. Way less bitchy, you know? They understand how men want to be treated." There are differences among the races—depending on how you define race, anyway. (Ancestry? Culture? Phenotype? Genetic makeup? Social identity? Geographic location?) People of Sub-Saharan African descent are more likely to have sickle cell anemia than those of other ancestries. Mediterranean-descended individuals suffer disproportionately from thalassemia. If you live in the American Southwest, you've got a better chance at contracting Bubonic plague than you would otherwise. Ashkenazi Jews have to worry about Tay-Sachs more than most. French-Canadians have a higher-than-usual tendency to fall under the curse of *le loup garou*. Moldavians succumb to vampirism more often than other Eastern Europeans.

The degeneration into cannibalistic, monstrous Wendigo typically only happens among the Algonquin peoples on the Atlantic Coast and in the Great Lakes region.
But there's not a "race," by any definition I know, that is inherently more meek or eager to please men than any other.

Things men other than the monster hunter have said to me in messages on dating sites, or on actual dates; a selection:

"You're so pretty. Like a lotus flower."
"What's your favorite martial art?"
"I think it's cool that you like to date American men."
"Since I started dating Oriental girls I never want to go back to regular ones."
"You have to admit, Pearl Harbor was kind of a dick move."
"I started the anime club in my high school, so I've always been a big supporter of your culture."
"What do you want to drink? The Kamikazes are really good here. Oh. Oh god. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean—I didn't mean anything—"
"Uh, do you mind if I drive? I mean, no offense or anything, but ..."
"I spent a year in China, so I really feel a connection with you."
(I suppose I should be happy no one's ever asked me if my vagina is sideways. We've come such a long way.)

There's a definition of *weed* I like a lot: "A weed is a plant out of place." Maybe a monster is just a creature out of place.

It would be much easier for a monster to find a place if people weren't such assholes.

...

Some people have a genetic predisposition to depression, or color-blindness, or perfect pitch, or tetrachromatic vision, or they're super tasters. Some people have heads that can detach at night and roam the world.

That doesn't make any of them monsters. Only actions make you a monster. A woman whose head can fly, who uses her power to glide among the clouds and watch the city lights below, who's never hurt a human and hasn't even bothered a cow or a sheep or a squirrel in years ... a woman like that is less of a monster than a man in a fedora with samurai swords who stalks that woman.

~ Miyuki Miyabe's "Chiyoko" is the sort of sweet, simple tale I seldom come across these days. Although its message is heavy-handed, the childlike optimism is refreshing. Especially while I'm translating a children's story. ;)

Peter says

This is a collection of fantasy stories, about half written by Japanese authors and translated, and about half written in English that just happen to involve some aspect of Japanese culture or mythology.

This is the same deal as *The Future is Japanese: Science Fiction Futures and Brand New Fantasies* from and about Japan., but at least this time, I'm not expecting more from it, so it's not as disappointing. I still wish it was mostly a collection of stories in translation, but I had to make my peace with it. And, besides, this is a fantasy collection, so my expectations are lowered anyway. Not that there's anything wrong with fantasy (it's certainly far better than a book that's completely mundane), it's just that I personally don't respond as well to it as science fiction. And while there's frustratingly almost always outright fantasy stories in what are supposedly science fiction collections (at least, when there isn't a defined theme around it being hard SF), rarely in my experience is the reverse true.

Luckily, this is one of the rare cases, as there are several that at least dance on the line between the two genres, if not crossing entirely.

For that reason, I think I may even like it more than *TFIJ*. But like all short story collections, it's a mixed bag. Some I liked, some I didn't care for at all. And maybe more often than not, the ones I didn't care for were slogs or felt utterly pointless rather than simply being not my thing. But I was pleasantly surprised by how many I genuinely liked.

The standouts, for me, were:

"Scissors or Claws, and Holes" by Yusaku Kitano (a weird tale of microscopic organisms that try to colonize and can let you see the future, but you must be very careful how you act).

"Girl, I Love You" by Nadia Bulkin (set in a world where curses have begun to work, and following the friend of a girl who paid the ultimate sacrifice to stop a bully)

"From the Nothing, With Love" by Project Itoh (a weird tale of an immortal but very familiar spy).

"Those Who Hunt Monster Hunters" by Tim Pratt (a bit unsubtle but still enjoyable tale of someone seeking revenge on a self-styled monster hunter).

"The Street of Fruiting Bodys" by Sayuri Ueda (about a fungal plague that, possibly, causes those it kills to become ghosts)

I still think I'd give it only 3 stars, like the other anthology, but it's a much higher 3 stars.

Michelle says

I enjoyed this collection, however it was a bit more hit and miss for my personal tastes than the previous one in the same series. Some stories I really enjoyed and then others didn't resonate with me.

The highlights were:

'Scissors or Claws, and Holes' by Yusaku Kitano

'Girl, I Love You' by Nadia Bulkin

'From the Nothing, With Love' by Project Itoh

'Those Who Hunt Monster Hunters' by Tim Pratt

'The Street of Fruiting Bodies' by Sayuri Ueda

Marie-Therese says

3 1/2 stars. Probably the best of the 3 Haiksoru anthologies I've read so far.

Like all the other Haiksoru anthologies I've read, this is a pretty mixed bag with some very weak, amateurish work bracketed by a few outstanding stories. The variable quality can get tiresome, but Dempow Torishima's 'Sisyphean' is probably the weirdest thing I've read in ages (maybe since encountering Michel Bernanos The Other Side of the Mountain in the VanderMeer's The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories collection) and worth the price of the book itself, if you like the genuinely, bizarrely strange.

Mieneke says

When I was contacted about reviewing *Phantasm Japan* by its editor, Nick Mamatas, I was excited, because the anthology's premise — bringing stories about Japan and/or by Japanese writers to a broader public — sounded really good and I'm always interested in broadening my cultural scope so to speak. So I'm a little sad to report I was somewhat disappointed by this collection of stories. To be fair, this may be because it turns out I'm not the best reader for these stories that have a specific aesthetic and form, which can feel a little choppy story-wise. But mostly it was because there were several stories that just didn't work for me.

Unfortunately, the two stories that worked least for me, were also two of the longest stories in the bunch. In fact, one of them Dempow Torishima's *Sisyphean* is the longest one clocking in at a whopping 71 pages. *Sisyphean* was a story that was just too weird for me to parse. There are probably people out there who will love it to bits exactly because of its weirdness, but for me it was just hard to get through all the descriptions and trying to picture them in my mind and I think it got in the way of my appreciating the underlying story, which was interesting; interesting enough for me to wrestle through all of the 71 pages. The other story that didn't work for me at all was Quentin S. Crisp's *The Last Packet of Tea*, so much so that I couldn't even finish it, in fact I didn't even get past the first five pages. And I tried to read it three times. What bounced me out of the story every time was its prose. The writing just felt very heavy-handed and overly florid. It rarely happens that I just can't finish a story, but this was one such occasion. The story may be brilliant, but I couldn't get past the writing.

Of course there were also some stories that I really loved. I think my favourite of the bunch was Project Itoh's *From the Nothing, With Love*. A brilliant SFnal take on the James Bond lore, I loved how the story played with the different concepts of awareness and the true meaning of the soul. The twist at the end was magnificent and I really enjoyed this story. Another one I really loved was Miyuki Miyabe's *Chiyoko*. Featuring a huge pink rabbit suit, several generations of toys and some beautiful notions on the importance of child's play and beloved toys, I absolutely adored this one and its ending. Jacqueline Koyanagi's *Kamigakari* is a haunting story about the end of the world by the sun going supernova, told in a fascinating two-person second person narration. And lastly there was Gary A. Braunbeck's *Shikata Ga Nai: A Bag Lady's Tale*. A ghost story with a memory quilt at its heart, it also dealt with the sad truth of the Japanese internment camps in the US during the Second World War. I loved the gentle tailor and the kind-hearted soldier and the tragedy innate to this tale.

While there were stories I really enjoyed, on the whole *Phantasm Japan* left me a little underwhelmed. With the exception of the first two stories I discussed, I generally enjoyed the anthology's stories, with the four other stories discussed above being the stand-outs. Again, I may just not be the intended audience for these tales. If you enjoy stories that are different from the mean or want to explore stories not set in or written by the common (medieval) Western world then *Phantasm Japan* is certainly a work you should seek out.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

V.S. Nelson says

Some interesting stories, but ultimately ruined by Sisyphean, which was just bloody nonsense.

Alexander Páez says

Antología muy irregular, con un inicio accidentado pero que se recupera gracias a algunos relatos espectaculares y por los cuales vale la pena adentrarse en la antología.

Cristian says

The shortest stories in the bunch were the best.
