



Saturn Apartments, Vol. 1

Hisae Iwaoka , Matt Thorn (Translator) , Tomo Kimura (Translator) , Eric Erbes (Letterer and Touch-Up Artist)

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A touching, character-rich vision of an intriguing new world.

Far in the future, humankind has evacuated the earth in order to preserve it. Humans now reside in a gigantic structure that forms a ring around the earth, 35 kilometers up in the sky. The society of the ring is highly stratified: the higher the floor, the greater the status.

Mitsu, the lowly son of a window washer, has just graduated junior high. When his father disappears and is assumed dead, Mitsu must take on his father's occupation. As he struggles with the transition to working life, Mitsu's job treats him to an outsider's view into the living-room dioramas of the Saturn Apartments.

Saturn Apartments, Vol. 1 Details

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From Reader Review Saturn Apartments, Vol. 1 for online ebook

Dan Schwent says

Mitsu follows in the footsteps of his father and becomes a window washer at the Saturn Apartments, the Dyson ring surrounding Earth that houses all of humanity...

Saturn Apartments is my first encounter with slice of life manga and I have to say I dug it. Mitsu's father died years earlier and upon his graduation, Mitsu chooses to follow in his footsteps. Saturn Apartments follows Mitsu on the job, learning about his father from his former co-workers and encountering interesting characters, like Mr. Tanuki, the dolphin breeder, and Sachi, an inspector that lives on the surface of the ring.

For a manga with almost no action, Saturn Apartments was a riveting read. The artwork was surprisingly detailed at times and Mitsu's journey into discovering his father and his place in the world was an oddly touching tale. I'll be picking up the subsequent volumes. Four out of five stars.

Emma says

I came across Saturn Apartments because I read Wandering Son: Volume One, and wow, am I sure glad I did! Hisae Iwaoka has created such a unique, interesting manga series - I've never read anything quite like it.

it is the far future, Earth is no longer inhabitable, so humans live in a giant ring around the earth. Mitsu is the son of a window washer - one of the lowest and most dangerous occupations - and must take over after his father's untimely death. This premise itself feels very different to me, but the artwork style is also something I haven't seen before, and I love it! Iwaoko combines very emotive panels with large, beautiful, sprawling images of the ring, space, and earth.

Granted I haven't read a lot of science fiction, but to me, what makes a successful Sci-Fi story is the combination of good characters, excellent world building, and interesting science. I think what makes Saturn Apartments so memorable, is the use of the large science fiction setting to provide a world where Mitsu's story can take place. It will be interesting to see whether Mitsu explores the social inequalities he experiences - literally, the higher you are up the ring, the healthier, wealthier, and happier you are.

Jaylee says

I really, really loved this. The sci-fi concept is really unique and interesting. The entire earth is declared a wildlife sanctuary to try to revitalize the environment, and humans live in a man-made "ring" around the planet. The story explores it through one guy who cleans the windows on the ring. He has to go outside and do very dangerous work. It explores the concept in-depth, including how class and poverty work in that world, all surrounding the life of one guy and his family and friends. It's really well done and interesting, and I would definitely love to read more.

Bee says

3,5*

Celá recenzia na blogu: <http://eike.blog.cz/1704/saturn-apart...>

Seth T. says

[Review of volumes 1 and 2.]

Generally, there are two kinds of science fiction. The most common are stories that use imaginary technologies, alien races, and futuristic promise as a gimmick, a means to wowing audiences with slick bombast in order to distract from narrative deficiencies. The original *Star Wars*, for all its good points, makes prominent use of this technique. Viewers are confronted with impressive fabrications—TIE fighters, droids, a landspeeder, the Millennium Falcon, the Mos Eisley cantina, and the Death Star—all to the end of camouflaging bad dialogue and weak acting. Certainly we give ourselves over to the film's charms, but *Star Wars* uses its setting to disguise its weaknesses.

Less common are examples that use science fiction as a means to approach social issues from a perspective divorced from a reality that may be overladen with presuppositions and biases. These stories extrapolate worlds that may someday exist in order to speak to present concerns. *Gattaca*, *A Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *1984* each use their setting for the purpose of something more than simply providing an engaging entertainment.

Hisae Iwaoka's *Saturn Apartments* is somewhat enigmatic then in that it seems to fit neither of these categories. While the book does include a number of set pieces that provide fantastic viewscapes (notably, some gorgeous illustrations of the earth from outside the book's principal space structure), these have no narrative inadequacies to cover up. And while the book does present a world in which the strict class systems common to some dystopian fiction exert negative influence on its cast, making social statements seems to be the least of Iwaoka's concerns. (That may change as the story evolves, but as of the first two volumes, he doesn't seem overly interested in addressing social inequity.) Instead, the futurism and social state of *Saturn Apartments* seems in place wholly to the end of presenting a fully forged world in which Iwaoka's small story can take place.

When I say *small story* that is only to say that this is not a book devoted to national or interspecies struggles. This is not a series about the end of the world (in a way, that already happened). This is not the story of good vs. evil, the rescue of a princess, or a race to recover a lost treasure before it's lost for all time. It's just the story of a boy who's just joined the workforce and is trying to come to grips with who he is in the shadow of his father's death five years early.

And in that way, *Saturn Apartments* may actually be a bigger story than *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings*. After all, every person is an expansive universe of interests, motives, stories, treacheries, and dreams. And each of these universes is governed by an entirely unique set of forces, every bit as sovereign as gravity and

entropy.

In *Saturn Apartments*, the earth, for reasons as yet untreated had been abandoned for decades, existing now as a global nature preserve. Whether due war or pollution or a humanitarian attempt at a Babel-like house to scrape the heavens is, seemingly, apart from the interests of the series. All that matters is that the earth has been abandoned and all the remnant humanity dwells on a great ring encircling the earth in low orbit, pretty much smack in the middle of the stratosphere. While never explicitly referred to within the text as the Saturn Apartments, the ring does make the earth resemble Saturn a bit. Or at least maybe Uranus. The ring itself is divided into three strata, upper, middle, and lower sections. The middle section is devoted to public works such as schools, parks, government, and scientific endeavors. Elites live in the upper reaches of the ring while everyone else is shuffled into the lower division.

Saturn Apartments primary narrative conceit (I mean, beyond the ring itself) is that somebody's got to wash all those windows. Dwellings that sit on the epidermis of the ring have windows that look out into the reaches of space (everyone else has to content themselves with artificial light and skies) and, even in space, a film of dust gradually accumulates. Those with the money to do so, hire window washers to help them keep their perspicuity. As washers require space suits, months of training, and hours to pressurize in order to clean windows, it's rare that anyone from the lower levels have the opportunity to clean their windows; ironically, it's these grime-caked windows of the lower levels that face the earth and the spectacular view that such portals could provide.

Iwaoka's protagonist is Mitsu, the orphaned son of Aki, a washer who fell to earth in a window-washing accident five years ago. Mitsu has just graduated high school and is accepted into his father's guild, where he encounters all of Aki's old friends and co-workers. Mitsu is both diligent and distracted, the presence of a hard-working father he barely knew weighing heavily on his life and direction. He's a little bit lost, a little bit unformed, and pretty uncertain about his purpose in things. He's eager to find and prove his place within the guild but until he discovers himself for who he is, he'll never be able to confidently chart his own personal destiny.

Saturn Apartments charts Mitsu's course through the interpersonal exchanges he experiences with co-workers and clients and then through the friendships he forms as a result. Mitsu's path evolves from one marked by loneliness toward something a bit more rounded with a breadth of human contact. Much of the fun of the series is watching him negotiate these new relationships while he takes cues from those around him in an attempt to understand how normal people interact. He's a great observer and does his best to conscientiously apply the practical knowledge his observations lend him. By having Mitsu looking in on a variety of lives from the outside literally looking in, Iwaoka leaves herself plenty of room to explore numerous story and relationship paths before wearing out her and Mitsu's welcome.

One of the charms of *Saturn Apartments* is its unique visual sense. Iwaoka employs a style of illustration uncommon in, at the least, the manga I've yet encountered. Her character compositions sit far from what we may have come to expect from our Japanese comics, neither favouring the bold dynamism common in shōnen nor the ephemeral willowness of shōjo. Iwaoka instead essays what I imagine would have to be some sort of indie manga. Her line is confident in its hesitance, a practiced stutter. In many cases, independent creators have more imagination than they have talent; this is decidedly not the case with Iwaoka's work. She creates big-headed people and her men are often distinguishable from her women by fashion alone—all, I

suspect, by design. She also frequently employs visual gags to lighten the mood of what could otherwise be a book too sober by half.

Saturn Apartments is an exciting book to take part in as its release gradually unfolds. Generally, I prefer to take in a series once its publication is complete (therefore eliminating the story-hindering two-to-ten-month wait between volumes), but *Saturn Apartments* is such a quiet pleasure for me that I'm happy to take it in whatever chunks are available to me.

[Review provided courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Sesana says

The Earth is a nature preserve. The population has been moved to a massive building that rings the world. Hardly a utopia, the classes are divided by floors. The poorest on the bottom floors, the richest on the highest floors. This isn't the plot of the book. There aren't, as of yet, any brave rebels fighting against the social order. This is just the backdrop.

The real story is about Mitsu, window washer. In orbit, washing windows outside is a dangerous task. Mitsu's father fell while washing windows, and now that he's graduated from school, he'll try to take his father's place in the window washers' guild. And so we have a series of quiet stories about life in orbit, with the science fiction setting serving as a backdrop and a catalyst for recognizable, small human dramas. One of the stories is about a bride who saves so she can have her window washed on her wedding day. Yes, it's entirely slice-of-life in a distant future.

The stories are engaging because of the characters, vivid and realistic even if they only show up on a few pages. Mitsu, our lead, is one of the most engaging. Lonely, hardworking, more sympathetic to the situations of others than to his own.

The art won't be for everyone. The characters are sketchy, but still fairly expressive, and there are lots of unexpected details as well as the occasional completely stunning panel.

Michael says

I am not one for the Manga. I love American comics and don't read a lot of the comics that are backwards, but I thought *Saturn Apartments* looked like a cool comic. The art was interesting, I would say normal manga style. The story was amazing. It was the type of story that could have been really boring and lame, but Hisae Iwaoka pulls it off amazingly. Her view of this future world is amazing. The way Mitsu has to interact with everyone is great.

The premise of the manga is the world is now a natural reserve. No humans are allowed on it anymore. All the humans live hundreds of feet above the earth in a tube. This tube is made of glass and has different levels. The bottom levels are where the poor live. The middle levels have schools and the top levels are for the rich.

Mitsu lives in the bottom levels. He is an orphan who lives in his own apartment. His neighbors look out for

him as h has just graduated school. Now he's off to his first job as a window cleaner. Window cleaners clean the outside of the tube. It's a hard and dangerous job, but Mistu wants to do it. His father did it before him.

The story then moves through Mistu life as he works as a window cleaner and tries to find more out about his father and his death. I loved this manga. It has a lot of story and room for the characters to grow.

Jenny Clark says

The landscapes out side are beautiful, contrasted with the crowded, dim inside lower levels. The characters are very adorable, I love Iwaoka's style.

This is another calming, lazy day manga, much like Aria and Nana, surprising as that may be with it starting with a 14 year old boy graduating middle school and heading to work, since his father fell to earth from the ring.

He does this because he has to pay back his student loans. For middle school.

I absolutely love Jin, he acts so grumpy but he really cares about Mitsu and his wife.

I wonder if this will explore all the inequality there is in the ring, what with window washing only being affordable for the rich, the groom in the one story not being able to get a good job because he was a low level-er and all the rest.

I also wonder about Jin's friend's wife. Why did she not help Jin? Or would he have refused charity as he would have seen it?

It's very interesting how their are drawbacks shown to all levels of the life they live as well. The three characters we meet from the upper levels are alone in huge rooms/apartments and seem a little lonely. They also mostly want things that did not work out for them, such as the biologist wanting to give his beluga whale an ocean show. It was Mitsu and Jin who did that, and the engineer who wanted to make a window washing robot, but found out no robot could do better than a human. Jin's friends wife also wanted to give her husband open sky and freedom, but could not. It was Jin who did.

Contrasted with this is the lower level life. Sure, it is crowded and there is very little natural light, but look at any scene set there and no one is alone. The window washers are in their guild headquarters together. The Kagayamas are together with their daughter (or she sneaks into Mitsu's apartment) Jin has his wife, there is always someone there to watch out for you.

Window washing is dangerous for many reasons, but the window washers are usually healthier because they get more natural light than mist low level residents.

A story that gently teaches everything has two sides, good and bad, light and dark.

I'm sad the library only has this one.

Joan Concilio says

Needed a new manga series - and this one is excellent.

Michael Scott says

TODO:

+++ surprisingly interesting arch-story. The cleaning boy involved in a coming-of-age story is not exactly a guarantee for box-office success. Plus it's sci-fi with a vague hint of dystopia (and that's why I like it.) The

small stories have little connection with another, but can be surprisingly good.

+++ very nice graphics, especially panoramic and fish-eye shots. Hisae Iwaoka is such a fine pen drawer and inker.

+ +/ - Characters: the boy is believable and endearing. The main helper, despite vague attempts to make palatable, raises antipathy. Same goes for the new family. Some of the numerous cast are also interesting, even lovable. This is perhaps the main problem I see with Hisae Iwaoka's work: same as for other great mangaka, although she seems to easily make us care about the main character, but not for the secondaries.

Charlotte B. says

Un joli manga au trait très épuré et à l'histoire intrigante. Le jeune Mitsu est nettoyeur de vitres de la cité Saturne, un anneau construit autour de la Terre pour abriter les humains qui ne peuvent plus vivre sur leur ancienne planète. Les plus pauvres vivent en bas, les plus riches en haut.

L'histoire a beaucoup de potentiel mais je trouve que tout reste très superficiel pour le moment, on ne révèle pas beaucoup de choses sur ce qui a mené l'humanité à vivre là, sur l'état actuel de la Terre. Les rencontres que fait Mitsu sont intéressantes mais encore une fois, pas toujours très poussées. Mais j'ai bien envie de connaître la suite, j'espère que ça se développera plus.

Darcy Roar says

I quite enjoy the more mundane view of the future shaped (so far at least) without violence. A comforting little world to explore class issues in (and personal issues too, of course). A pleasantly nostalgic future book.

Skye Kilaen says

Updated 6/11/18 to include non-spoiler discussion of entire series.

Quiet, thoughtful, initially slice-of-life manga about Mitsu, a young man who takes a job washing the windows of a station in near-Earth orbit. All humans live there, having abandoned the Earth to keep it as a nature preserve. Mitsu's father died doing the same job, and the story (so far) mostly revolves around Mitsu's attempts to learn more about his father by following his vocation.

Saturn Apartments is kind of like Makoto Yukimura's *Planetes* in that it focuses on the lives of working class people in a science fiction setting. It's more about characters than human colonization of space, though, especially as Mitsu begins to interact more with his coworkers and their families, and upper-class clients of his window-washing company.

The art is a little funny, with characters of all ages drawn with toddler proportions, i.e. big heads, small bodies. Older characters do look a little less toddler-y than junior high graduate Mitsu, so I adjusted pretty quickly. It's more than made up for by the amazing perspective work with rooms, both large and small, and the exterior of the station during work shifts. Several times I had to stop just to gawk at a specific panel.

The personal growth, relationships, and vignettes about people on the station are so intriguing that I would have been happy reading this series just for that for more than its seven books. However, a larger plot started emerging later in the series where some working-class people on the station began a project to drop a manned craft down to Earth. Without spoiling, I can say that this project ends up intersecting with the class tensions on the station in an interesting and dramatic way that involves every character we got to know over the series. Every bit of character development for them was important to the series conclusion, which was was 100% satisfying. Very skillfully told.

Alex Scales says

Let me tell you guys about the revelation I had while reading Saturn Apartments. And I'm not going to lie, this is more babbling than a forward review. Also I'm writing this at 3 am. I am tired. So feel free to ignore this and read something more intelligent.

I've read a lot of science fiction. A lot. Even have an entire bookshelf full of Gibson, Haldeman, Heinlein, etc. And yet I don't really consider myself a fan, and I'm always a little cautious about what science fiction books I'll pick up next. For the longest time I figured there has been something I have been resistant to about the genre, and I thought maybe I just secretly found the genre boring unless sword heaving robot kings or Terminators were involved.

But I figured it out while reading Saturn Apartments. Iwaoka has this amazing ability to balance good characters and world building. Each chapter is fully character driven, and the art does a great job of showing us how this world surrounds the characters instead of just leaving it as a back drop for some random adventures. At the same time, the world building never takes precedence over character development.

In fact I think there's plenty of comics out there that excel at this, especially manga. I feel like I could say the same about A,A', To Terra, I might argue Akira even fits the bill. But I'm not sure I could say the same about a lot of the prose sci-fi I've been devouring since I was a teenager.

I really do think it's that balance I'm missing. There's just so many books focused on the world building or the high concept that it leaves the characters a bit flat. Of course, I can think of several books that do a beautiful job of balancing both (I'm partial to some of Le Guin's work myself). I'm just saying I think I know the sort of books I'll be hunting for in the future.

Dov Zeller says

Mitsu becomes a window washer. That's what happens in Saturn apartments. The end.

So what makes it so special ? (And it is truly a tale well told).

Mitsu is a young and somewhat innocent kid who lives in a post earth-pocalyptic world. Humans have abandoned the earth in hopes of undoing or ameliorating the damage done, or at least not doing any more, and now they live in a giant three-tiered structure that forms a ring around the earth. And it is here where Mitsu becomes a window washer. And it is as a window-washer Mitsu begins to learn about the world, and about the complexity of relationships (neither friendship nor enmity are simple things, and even power

comes with its frustrations and consequences.) Moreover, it is in this world, and with a view of the earth, Mitsu's father died, somewhat mysteriously, five years before the action of the novel begins. When Mitsu sees the view his father likely saw the day he disappeared, he is mesmerized by the earth's beauty, and longs to get to its surface some day (where he imagines his father to be.)

This is not necessarily a mystery or an outer-space action-adventure novel. It's a carefully drawn exploration of Mitsu's social and emotional world, and of the futuristic social world as a whole, which is not so different -- a place with intense class stratifications and complex friendships. The consequences of poverty are not exactly as they are on earth (those on the bottom of the three tiers are on the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum and the only ones who have a view of the earth, but not if the windows are not regularly cleaned. And hiring people to clean windows take money. Those on the top tier, the wealthy, are the only ones who have enough natural light to keep them from getting sick.)

Mitsu has friends and enemies and then there are the people who are clearly important but mysterious, too. I look forward to reading more of this series and seeing Mitsu continue on his adventures. I highly recommend this book.
