



# Occupied City

*David Peace*

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On January 26, 1948, a man posing as a public health official arrives at a bank in Tokyo. He explains that he's there to treat everyone who might have been exposed to a recent outbreak of dysentery. Soon after drinking the medicine he administers, twelve employees are dead, four are unconscious, and the "official" has fled. Twelve voices tell the story of the murder from different perspectives including a journalist, a gangster-turned-businessman, an "occult detective," and a well-known painter. Each voice enlarges and deepens the portrait of a city and a people making their way out of a war-induced hell. Told with David Peace's brilliantly idiosyncratic and mesmerizing voice, *Occupied City* is a stunningly audacious work from a singular writer.

## Occupied City Details

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Author : David Peace

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# From Reader Review Occupied City for online ebook

## Nathanael Booth says

David Peace follows his spectacular "Tokyo Year Zero" with a book that is, if possible, even more staggering: a twelve-voiced account of a notorious mass murder that took place in Tokyo in 1948. Much has been made of his debt to "Rashomon," and comparisons have also been drawn between this novel and "The Waste Land," but what is most fascinating to me is the way Peace once more draws parallels between the murders that form the basis of the book and the destructive impact of war on those who participate in it. As in the previous novel, the killer here (insofar as he is ever truly revealed) is the product of atrocities committed during WWII on behalf of the Japanese army. Peace makes it clear, however, that the Japanese were far from the only ones engaged in the horrifying experiments with bacteriological warfare; every nation, victor and vanquished, is culpable in the crimes and also in their covering-up. The rot here is all-pervasive. Peace also delivers an interesting meditation on the role of the author-as-medium, especially when the author's theme is an historical event. This matches the voice here: incantatory, mesmerizing, drawing up the voices of people who have died and who, perhaps, never lived—weaving them together into a story that is as intriguing as it is distressing. This is the second novel in a trilogy; Peace has said that he has an overarching plan for the series, so it should be interesting to see what direction he takes from here.

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## Thomas Dale says

I found it to be a very cleverly written book, but tough to read. Don't know if it was the story, the context, or the style. But it took me forever to get through.

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## Pauline says

I had a hard time with this book. I felt like I was reading a long poem rather than a prose book and I think that may have been what was challenging for me. It didn't really give me anything to hold on to that I usually need-character or plot. The writing is very rhythmic (lots of repetition), descriptive, visual (use of punctuation, capitals), layered and I think the idea is probably to evoke emotion but it just made it confusing for me. I read this for book group, so I'm hoping the power of the group will give me insights that my inadequate comprehension didn't!

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## Vasilis says

Μου ?ρεσε πιο πολ? απ? το πρ?το του βιβλ?ο. ?ταν ενδιαφ?ρον ο τρ?πος γραφ?ς του βιβλ?ου και η εξ?λιξη της ιστορ?ας με αυτ?ν τον τρ?πο. Στο τ?λος με ?φησε με μια γλυκ?πικρη (κυρ?ως πικρ?) α?σθηση.

Τι ε?ναι ικανο? να κ?νουν οι ?νθρωποι και μ?χρι που μπορ?ν να φτ?σουν...

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## Patrick McCoy says

There's a fascinating story buried in Dave Peace's latest novel, *Occupied City*. It is the story of a mass murder carried out in the guise of treatment for a dysentery outbreak in order to rob a bank in post war Tokyo. It is a true story and suggests that the killer may have been from the infamous unit 731 that was developing weapons for biological warfare. The story is somewhat hard to piece together due to the experimental style Peace used in this novel. This might have something to do with reading his first novel, 1974, from *The Red Riding* series recently, which has a more straightforward manner of storytelling. The 13 different narrators are somewhat of a distraction like some of the experimental prose. It was effective in some sections, but I wasn't particularly impressed with his American impersonation of Lt. Colonel Murray Thompson writing his letters home to Peggy. That being said I think it might make a better film than novel. I didn't know the story and didn't predict the ending.

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## Israel Calzadilla says

Segundo libro de la "Trilogía de Tokio", el primero 'Tokyo Año Cero', del mismo autor, es muy bueno y la secuela se me antojó fácilmente, este sin embargo, es un desastre.

"Occupied City" cuenta la historia real de Hirasawa Sadamichi en el caso de los asesinatos por envenenamiento en Tokio de 1948.

La novela es en realidad un largo "poema", la prosa no tiene realmente una estructura interesante. No hay nada de donde aferrarse y es extremadamente repetitivo. La intención parece ser evocar la emotividad, pero la verdad el formato es atorrante, pero más que nada aburrido.

La historia está narrada desde distintos puntos de vista de los testigos, policías o sobrevivientes, algunos, más bien, uno solo es brillante. El oficial del Ejército de Estados Unidos que a través de cartas a su esposa y las notas a su cuartel general nos hace presenciar su descenso a la locura, el cual es bastante desgarrador. El resto, es totalmente prescindible.

He visto reseñas de gente enloquecida por la prosa o el formato narrativo experimental del libro, señores, esto es de principiantes, léanse a Cortazar y después hablamos.

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## Paul says

*Occupied City* is the follow-up to *Tokyo Year Zero* (one of my fav reads of '08, and a finalist for the Shirley Jackson Awards). It's 1947, and a man walks into a bank, claiming to be an Occupation Authority, saying that dysentery has broken out in the neighborhood and that everyone in the bank needs to drink his medicine

to be protected/inoculated. The result is a mass poisoning (linked to previous war crimes) that it is the center of the novel. We experience the murders (pre, during, and aftermath) from 12 different POVs. The narrative structure is dizzying at times, but always mesmerizing, and like nothing you've read before. Peace is a new favorite writer of mine.

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## **Violet wells says**

Tokyo 1948: a man posing as a health inspector tells a bank manager there has been an outbreak of dysentery nearby. He asks the bank manager to gather together all the staff because he has brought with him a serum that will protect them from the infection. The health inspector shows the sixteen staff how to administer the serum. However, he isn't a health inspector and the serum isn't a serum. It's a deadly poison. The killer disappears with some of the bank's money though not all of it. A mystery. This is a true story of a crime that still causes controversy in Japan. Many believe an innocent man was hanged for the crime.

Peace uses for his structure a ghost-story-telling game popularised during the Edo period in which each narrator extinguishes a candle when they have told their tale of supernatural horror. In other words, the darkness increases as the night wears on. Peace's narrators include the victims of the crime, the investigators of the crime and those accused of the crime. He explores one popular hypothesis that the killer was a disgruntled member of Unit 731, a Japanese biological weapons division that bred plague-infected rats and fleas to spread disease in China and infected prisoners of war with deadly incubated toxins.

This is story telling at its most inventive and, you could also say, at its most challenging for the reader. I would argue that the no writer has quite managed to employ rhythm as such a key illuminating component of storytelling as Virginia Woolf did in *The Waves*. The repetitive rhythm of her sentences in that book is like a hidden accumulative part of its reach and meaning. Peace also is a rhythm-master and here reminded me of Woolf, though like Woolf on heroin. Both he and Woolf use rhythm to probe into the darkness of the human psyche. Except where Virginia seeks out light, Peace seeks out new depths of darkness. His hammering highly stylised repetitive prose style will probably alienate 80% of readers – it doesn't always work but when it does it's fabulous. I'm going to quote a passage at random to give an idea of how he writes –

But the War Machine rolls on, never stopping, never resting, never sleeping, always rising, always consuming, always devouring. On and on, the War Machine rolls on, across empires and across democracies, on and on, over the well-fed and over the ill-fed, on and on, and, all the while, from hand to hand, hand into wallet, wallet into bank, bank into loan, loan to stocks and shares, my stocks and my shares, money passes, money changes, money grows-

If you fancy a different kind of read....

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## **Frank says**

The second in a promised trilogy about life and crime in Tokyo during the US occupation. This one is heavily influenced by Kurosawa's "Rashomon" which itself was based on short fiction by Akutagawa. Peace has a unique style which one has to experience to appreciate. I enjoyed this one but not quite as much as his

earlier "Year Zero".

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## Prima Seadiva says

Audiobook. Hated it.

The author repeats phrases continually. Yes, repeats continually. Continually repeats the same maybe a slight change in order. Every sentence. Sentence repeats. One time for each character. Yes, each character. Did I say it repeats? Yes, repeats each time. Each and every sentence repeating.

I made through disc one. At that point I knew I wanted to stomp on the disc-not a good thing to do with a library item. I checked this out thinking it sounded like an interesting mystery based on real events. Could be but the constant repetition supposedly by various characters viewpoints (not evident with this reading) was maddening and pretentious.

I'm not sure the style of this book is suited to audio listening format but I doubt I'd finish it on paper. The reader did not seem to be able to differentiate various voices emphasizing the repetition in the worst way. Looking at other reviews the writer apparently also used various fonts and layouts. This of course is not evident at all in a listening format. But the repetition. Did I say it repeats? Yes, it repeats. Hated it. Yes, hated it. Hated the repetition, yes.

Not for me.

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## foteini\_dl says

Είναι να κλειστοφοβική, σκληρή βιβλίο που θυμίζει ιατροδικαστική ρευνα το πιο ενδιαφέρον αστυνομικό που διβάσα εδ και καιρ (χωρίς να είμαι και μεγάλη φαν του είδους); Ναι.

Ξεκθάραι ναι.

Μ' αυτό εδ το μυθιστόρημα ο Peace σε κρατεί σε αγωνία, σε αποσυντονίζει και σε βγίζει έξω απ' την comfort zone σου. Και-ταυτόχρονα-κάνει να ηχηρή σχήλιο για τον πλεμο, που αποτελε βασική συστατική παράξη των καπιταλιστικών κοινωνιών.

Ενδιαφέροντα και η δομή των κεφαλαίων, που-πως διβάσα, μιας και δεν είμαι εξοικειωμένη με την ιαπωνική κουλτούρα-ακολουθεί κάποιο παραδοσιακό τρόπο αφήγησης των σάμουρι (ο δίδος ο συγγραφέας ζήτησε κάποια χρονία στην Ιαπωνία): υπάρχουν 12 αφηγητές και ο καθένας, αφο διηγήθηκε την ιστορία του-σβίνει απ' να κερ. Απ' το φως στο σκοτάδι. Εκεί που σβήναν να-να τα κερι, νιώθα πως αρχίζα να βυθίζομαι στο σκοτάδι, να ελαττώνεται ο αέρας δίπλα μου και να μου δημιουργούνται νέοι φόβοι απ' το πουθεν.

Μοναδικό μειονέκτημα που βρήκα-και χάσε πντους/αστερικά (whatever)-είναι τι σε πολλή σημεία της αφήγησης ο συγγραφέας επαναλαμβάνανε πολλές προτσεις ξαν και ξαν? μια τεχνική που με κουράζει. Κατ' τά' άλλα, μου ρεσε πολ το βιβλίο και θ' αναζητήσω στο μέλλον κι άλλα βιβλία του Peace σ'γουρα.

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## Tony says

Peace, David. OCCUPIED CITY. (2010). \*\*. This is the kind of book that polarizes readers. They either like it, and praise it to the skies, or they hate it, and condemn it to the shelf of forgotten books. It is said to be a novel. It says so right there on the cover. Maybe it is, but the story – such as it is – is told by a series of narrators with a variety of speech defects and mental aberrations that lead to discontinuities in their thought processes. I'm old fashioned. When I read a novel, I expect that there is a story to be told, and that it will be told well. I'm not the type of person who wants to fight their way through 274 pages of 'experimental' styles of writing. I'll take my time with a nonfiction book, because I want to learn something. With a novel, I was expecting that once I knew the story, there would be a plot. With a plot comes some good descriptive writing. Forget all that with this book. The 'novel' is about a true incident that occurred in occupied Japan in 1948. A man posing as a health official goes into a bank and tells the employees that there has been a local outbreak of dysentery and that he is there to inoculate each of them so that they will be protected. He apparently had all the right credentials and convinced the employees that he was on the level. He then administered a dose of two separate liquids to each of the twelve employees. Ten of them died almost immediately, and two other died in the hospital. It was one of the worst crimes to have occurred in Japan in years. The incident is told and retold in this book by each of the dead employees and several detectives who were on the case. Unfortunately, after fighting my way through about one hundred pages, I gave up. I can't give away the ending because I have no idea how it ends. If you are into 'novels' full of precocious and obfuscatory writing, then this is the book for you. If you're like me, you will skip it.

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## Derek Baldwin says

There are times THERE ARE TIMES ---there are times--- when the experimental style of The Occupied City IN THE OCCUPIED CITY WHEN I DEBATED CONTINUING WITH THIS BOOK ---I recognised and admired what a work of art this is--- of Peace's writing AND WISHED THE STORY COULD BE MORE SIMPLY TOLD ---but the narrative can be very dense, and it was slow going---. BUT IT'S VERY DEFINITELY WORTH PERSEVERING WITH. ---so I think I might need to re-read this some time.--- Especially the mind-fucking section near the end which has three different narratives woven together exactly like that (above). David Peace is a brave and committed writer, and this is an excellent book and a story that needed to be told. Maybe he is the new William Burroughs? Anyway: fantastic stuff.

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## Anthony Vacca says

If there is a more ambitious crime writer currently producing high quality works of bleak historical noir that crackle with experimental prose, then I want to know his or her name. But for now let it stand that David Peace is the real fucking deal. *Occupied City* is Peace's ballsiest (ovariesiest) fictional approach yet to putting the psyche of a place and time on the page.

The city is America-occupied Japan, the godforsaken year is 1948 - and on a lazy January afternoon, a man in a medical uniform walks into a bank and informs the staff that he is a government official here to inoculate all present against a possible outbreak of dysentery. Within minutes twelve men, women and children are dead, while four others cling to life in hospital. A media frenzy ensues to capture this mass murderer who appears to have poisoned all these innocent people as a means of robbing the bank. Many months later a respected water-color artist is arrested for the crimes; and though a great deal of evidence

points to the suspect being a patsy, the poor painter spends the next forty years in prison.

This slice-of-horrific-life true crime serves as the impetus for David Peace to go at his themes like a madman. Taking a page from Ryunosuke Akutagawa's "Rashomon" (famously adapted for the silver screen by Akira Kurosawa), *Occupied City* is structured as a séance, in which an unnamed writer (presumably meta-fictional David Peace), bears witness to the accounts of twelve different restless spirits, each of whom have suffered tragic fates in the events surrounding this crime.

The first chapter- which is relayed through the plural pronoun "We" - recounts the mass murder itself from the point of view of all twelve of those poisoned, setting the tone for the rest of the novel and its many idiosyncratic voices. A xenophobic detective in the midst of a mental breakdown, a gangster turned ruthless entrepreneur, an occult detective, an American scientist and a haunted survivor of the mass poisoning are just a few of the many unhappy souls the reader will meet as their stories are told through a variety of formats such as a detective's casebook, personal letters, magic incantations, classified documents, fables and torrents of gothic-tinged poetic flourishes.

As always Peace isn't the type of writer given to hand holding, and while there is a great deal of plot delivered from conflicting viewpoints, it's up to the reader to make many of the connections that link the narratives together. Peace's penchant for repetition and verse-like delivery is at its most polished here, deftly setting the tone for post-war Tokyo: a defeated city of defeated people, with little hope in sight as the Americans work to shape the country into a model of the U.S., and as the politicians left over from the previous regime scramble to cover their own asses and maintain the status quo of control over the masses—and all of this in the face of wartime atrocities involving biological warfare research conducted on thousands of POWs. After all, as the old cliché goes, history is not written by the downtrodden losers but by the victors with their great white-washing of history we call "progress."

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## Flannery says

when I read Tokyo Year Zero, I was stunned. The book was very special in my eyes, it was different, confusing and impressive. I didn't know David Peace before, though you always stumble upon his red-riding-quartet-series, when you are looking for something to read in the book stores. I really looked forward to the second part of his Tokyo-trilogy and when I finally finished it last week, I was overwhelmed.

*Occupied City* tells the story of a real crime in Tokyo in the year 1948, and from this starting-point describes the after-war-society in Japan. In 1948, a man, impersonating an member of the medical staff, comes into a bank after closing time, and tells the staff to drink a medicine against dysentery. After taking the medicine, most of the staff dies, the man robs the bank and disappears. The crime hasn't been solved till today.

The story of the crime and of the inquiry afterwards is told from 12 different perspectives. It begins with the lament of the 12 murdered persons, followed by the report of one of the detectives. Here two main suspects emerge: a painter who acts suspiciously and people who are connected with the Japanese biological warfare program in the 2nd worldwar. Other voices follow: e.g. an American scientist, a reporter, one of the surviving victims, a leading yakuza, another detective with links to the communists, the suspected painter, the real killer and at last the mother of one of the victims. Every part is written in an individual style: e.g. texts from a notebook, letters to the family, newspaper articles, parts of a diary (with legible crossed out sentences), a



kind of japanese puppet-show. The parts are not always easy to read, they repeat or contradict each other, they are mingling past and present or different voices in one head. But the story, the connection of the parts, follows a certain timeline and shows a certain development.

At the end you get the impression that all the characters are victims and culprits at the same time. They are laden with guilt (sometimes only because of having survived), but it seems, that not only their individual acting makes them guilty, but the whole society and the time they live in. They are all connected to the war-past and the present in the occupied city, to other people, to their believes and hopes. They are kind of struggling in a spiders web. The only real victims seem to be the murdered stuff-members and the lonely mother who has lost her son, and one recognizes at the end, that their sacrifice was in vain, because the chance to alter the way the japanese society developed after the war has not been seized. The solving of the crime could have been this chance, making public the background of the crime, which was connected to the biological warfare program. Instead a scapegoat was arrested, and the trials to clear him from the accusations have been unsuccessful till today.

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