



Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

Haruki Murakami , Alfred Birnbaum (Translator)

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'A narrative particle accelerator that zooms between Wild Turkey Whiskey and Bob Dylan, unicorn skulls and voracious librarians, John Coltrane and *Lord Jim*. Science fiction, detective story and post-modern manifesto all rolled into one rip-roaring novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is the tour de force that expanded Haruki Murakami's international following. Tracking one man's descent into the Kafkaesque underworld of contemporary Tokyo, Murakami unites East and West, tragedy and farce, compassion and detachment, slang and philosophy.'

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World Details

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Author : Haruki Murakami , Alfred Birnbaum (Translator)

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From Reader Review Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World for online ebook

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Sekai no owari to h?doboirudo wand?rando = Hard-boiled wonderland and the end of the world, Haruki Murakami

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (Sekai no owari to h?do-boirudo wand?rando) is a 1985 novel by Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. The English translation by Alfred Birnbaum was released in 1991. A strange and dreamlike novel, its chapters alternate between two bizarre narratives—"Hard-Boiled Wonderland" (a cyberpunk-like, science fiction part) and "The End of the World" (a virtual fantasy-like, surreal part).

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Kristin Myrtle says

This is a complex novel, one that required two reads for me. It tells two stories in alternating chapters. In the first we meet a mild-mannered data processor, only all his "processing" is done inside his head. See... he can do this thing, or he had this thing done to him that allows him to access both hemispheres of his brain simultaneously yet separately. He gets recruited for some top-secret government project led by some mad scientist type, who lives holed up in a cave (under a waterfall) with his buxom daughter. She is curious, virginal and perpetually attired in pink. Oh ya, and this mad scientist has this uncanny ability to remove sound. All the sound, all the sound in the world.

The second story involves another man. He has arrived in a new village. One entirely surrounded by high walls, really, really high walls. Unicorns graze and sleep in this peaceful hamlet. But in this town, mysteries abound. He is assigned a job. He is forced to give up his shadow and is put to work reading the old dreams out of unicorn skulls. The town inhabitants alter his eyes and sequester him to the "library" where all the skulls are kept. He meets a lovely assistant, he works hard, long hours in the dark. He becomes accustomed to it. All the while he is determined to have his shadow returned to him.

Are these two stories connected? And how? And these two men, are they the same person, two distinct people, or different aspects of one subconscious? Why do these two stories alternate? What does the shadow signify? And the unicorns? (Not to mention the skulls.) All these questions are what keep this novel going. And along the way you get the usual delightful Murakami musings. And Murakami's words, his prose, his verbage, the way he can turn a phrase... it all continues to STUN me, it FLOORS me and fascinates me. And this novel is no exception. Although I still haven't quite figured it out. Yet.

K.D. Absolutely says

This is an OK Murakami. My 8th and still counting. I will always admire his imagination, creativity and passion in writing. He will always be in my Top 10 Favorite Novelists list. But I am rating this as an OK book. Not my favorite Murakami. The reason? It just did not excite me.

Since I became an voracious reader and that happened partly because of Goodreads, I only religiously watch two shows: news (whichever I catch upon coming back home at night) and **American Idol**. Reading *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is like what one of the judges, Jennifer Lopez, commented to my favorite contestant, **Pia Toscano** (picture below) when she sang a Motown song a couple of weeks back.

[image error]

Singing: Checked. **Showmanship:** Checked. **Connection to the Audience:** Unchecked.

Reading this book is like having a huge kitchen sink being thrown at you. It is full of mind boggling details about two worlds narrated alternately. Even-numbered chapters talk about *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and odd-numbered ones talk about *End of the World*. There are so many characters (none of them named properly) and many conflicts that slowed down my understanding. It was good that I read this with a reading buddy and our pace was 2 chapters a day and we commented at the end of each day so that we were able to compare notes. It was good that she has stayed in Japan so she is familiar with its culture and she added spice to my reading. So, I thought I perfectly understood what this novel was all about and will not require a second reading for me. Unlike Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fe* that I thought I did not understand completely (because I rated it with 3 stars while my close reading friends rated them 5 stars), there is no Murakami mystery here that I thought I still need to unlock so toying an idea of re-reading is... cute.

Early this year, I read Jay Rubin's book on Murakami called *Music and Words*. It tells about Murakami and his passion in reading. Murakami is said to read around 250 novels a year and has been fascinated with Western literature, classic and contemporary. One of his main influences is Raymond Chandler, who is said to be the original hard-boiled writer. The End of the World narration here is similar to Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and the idea of a man being separated from his shadow can be found in Knut Hamsun's 1898 novel, *Victoria*.

Like Pia, Murakami's *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World* rates:

Writing: Checked. **Storytelling:** Checked. **Connection to Me:** Unchecked.

J Lo is always quick to add her usual sweetener when she sees that these adolescent contestants are about to cry: "But know that I love you, baby"

I am still a Murakami fan.

And after the Elton John night, with Pia Toscano singing another ballad, *Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me*, Pia is now leading in the Bloggers' American Idol Choice survey!

Which means J Lo and I could be wrong. But we all are entitled to our own opinions, aren't we?

Florencia says

And I couldn't be any other self but my self. Could I?

There is always a possibility.

In the summer of 1962, a poet wrote a song that would later become the last hymn to be heard as the end of the world approached. That is the song I chose to be my companion while writing another non-review; a song that is being followed closely by the mellifluous gusts of wind that break the silence of this monochromatic night.

Being my first Murakami, quite frankly, I didn't know what to expect. This is, without a doubt, one of the most original novels I have read this year. And I can't only ascribe this notion to the creativity of the plot, since the variations of the language used to illustrate it were another element that left me quite impressed.

I felt disconnected. Converting numbers in my brain was my only connection to the world. Most of my free time I chose to spend alone, reading old novels, watching old Hollywood movies on video, drinking. I had no need for a newspaper.

For a moment, I walked out of the comfort zone provided by classics and plunged into the world of more contemporary expressions in which I still feel like a slightly awkward guest. Murakami's writing stirred my senses from beginning to end. It did justice to the concept that was always hovering over this story: the duality of things around us, the dichotomies within ourselves. For this is a book that includes two different worlds that may or may not coalesce into one single reality someday. The first world is "Hard-Boiled Wonderland", where I found a peculiar voice; a somewhat stark, unvarnished writing. Words that tried to conceal the tiniest trace of emotional connection, congenitally unable to do otherwise. Detached words probably under the influence of an old pledge to keep distance from the world as a desperate attempt to protect themselves, to prevent their fragile system from blowing to smithereens. Words uttered by a narrator who was able to drink gallons of alcohol and then face inconceivably difficult situations and the most disgusting creatures ever, while thinking about sex on every given situation but still capable of disclosing colorful beads of a philosophical nature, which he tried to camouflage with waves of indifference, or rather fear wearing the translucent robes of indifference.

Who remembers stars? Come to think of it, had I even looked up at the sky recently? Had the stars been wiped out of the sky three months ago, I wouldn't have known... My world foreshortened, flattening into a credit card. Seen head on, things seemed merely skewed, but from the side the view was virtually meaningless—a one-dimensional wafer. Everything about me may have been crammed in there, but it was only plastic. Indecipherable except to some machine.

The second world is, ironically enough, "The End of the World", where Murakami's writing acquires a more expressive tone with which places and people are vividly portrayed. There, a narrator depicts a seemingly perfect world echoing an ancient nirvana, an empty world, a tempting world; descriptions that also convey

one significant distinction: everything might be happening now. *Only living will remain. Undisturbed, peaceful living.*

Facts unfold following the familiar cadences of a foreign narrative and I – stunned, in deep thought, marveled at how every piece falls into the right place, slowly, cautiously, with desperate detachment and stoic passion until the puzzle is almost complete – contemplate once more how life bifurcates and reveals two realities intrinsically different and yet strongly connected: one belongs to the actual world and the other to the realm of the mind. Everything might be connected in this *world surrounded by walls*. But then again, perhaps everything is an illusion, nothing is connected and we are truly alone. Hopefully, that too could be another figment of one's imagination.

You tell me there is no fighting or hatred or desire in the Town. That is a beautiful dream, and I do want your happiness. But the absence of fighting or hatred or desire also means the opposites do not exist either.

Despite the differences that perhaps exist only in the mind of this inexperienced reader, both forms of writing converge eventually. That is what made me change my opinion, since four solid stars became a glimmering 5-star rating after reaching to a certain point amid the distinctive ebb and flow of this novel. From that moment on – a moment which I will keep to myself, hoping you find yours – an unbridled desire to know more took over my body and I couldn't put this book down until it was over. Shortly after, I realized the mistake I had made, since I wasn't prepared for the billows of emotions that were about to sweep away every vestige of a former calm. (Not many are able to resist the allurements of the literary anxiety.)

That's the way with the mind. Nothing is ever equal. Like a river, as it flows, the course changes with the terrain.

After stepping in the middle of seven sad forests, and being out in front of a dozen dead oceans, questions began to haunt me, relentlessly, until some invaded my whole being and there one still lingers, for I haven't found any word willing to form a decent answer.

Here, in the palm of my hand, I have the story of a man facing an impending fate, remembering distant errors that will never be mend, old lyrics and classic scenes, the discrepancies between desire and reality, between who we are and who we would like to be; the little we say, the echoes of regret through the mountains of things unsaid; the departure from a world with the aftertaste of nothingness to enter one resembling everything. Despair, disillusionment, hell, reality; himself. Love, fear – love. Multiple shades of existence encapsulated in twenty-four hours. A woman, a song, the park under the sun. *Some limited happiness had been granted this limited life.* One last peal of a winter bell. The sounds of the end of the world.

Could I have given happiness to anyone else?

Sep 26, 16

* Also on my blog.

** Photo credit: via wallhere.com

*** I started writing it in June, then life and other books, now catching up.

Jenn(ifer) says

Maybe you've heard it said before: in every joke there is a grain of truth. Well, as many of you may remember, I've been known to pick on Jay Rubin now and again for what I perceive to be his clunky translations of Murakami's flawless prose. Because it couldn't possibly be that Haruki is a clunky writer. Get that thought out of your head right now!! So I like to kid poor Jay and make him the scapegoat, but the more I think about it, the more validity I find in my little quips. You see, dear reader, MY top three favorite Murakami novels were translated by this guy: Alfred Birnbaum. Hmm, coincidence? I'm not so sure...

Translations aside, as I mentioned in my little place holder review, Murakami's books are like comfort food for my soul. Let me explain this further. Like Haruki, I have a deep-seated love for music of all genres, and as a result I have a rather bloated music collection. Yet sometimes, for whatever reason, nothing I listen to pleases me. It is in these moments that I turn to Wilco. They never let me down. Something about the music is just so ... cozy. It doesn't make me mopey; it doesn't pick at my scabs, trying to open a healing wound; it doesn't make me wallow in the murky waters of nostalgia. The music manages to contentedly complement whatever mood or psychic place I'm in.

What does this have to do with Murakami? Well, I feel the same sort of cozy feeling when I read one of his novels. When the experimental fictions are crushing my brain or nothing else is really revving my engine, I pick up a Murakami novel and all is right with the world again. I know I'll be treated to a delicious, savory meal, a blend of musical delights, many an otherworldly adventure, and a couple of romps in the sack. Better than any date I've had in years.

KIDDING!

(Or am I?)

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World was no exception. In fact, in what I've come to love about Murakami, it is the rule. Mind bending, thought provoking, dreamlike and just a little bit sexy. Oh, and did I mention? Unicorns!

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Once, when I was younger, I thought I could be someone else. I'd move to Casablanca, open a bar, and I'd meet Ingrid Bergman. Or more realistically - whether actually more realistic or not - I'd tune in on a better life, something more suited to my true self. Toward that end, I had to undergo training. I read The Greening of America, and I saw Easy Rider three times. But like a boat with a twisted rudder, I kept coming back to the same place. I wasn't anywhere. I was myself, waiting on the shore for me to return.

Here's a little Wilco song that feels right at home with a Murakami novel:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgWJwx...>

Matthias says

In the unlikely event that Haruki Murakami's name on the cover is not in some way a quality label to you, guaranteeing profoundly outlandish scenarios and magic, he threw in the term "wonderland" to make sure everyone knew what to expect. Does the story deliver on all the promises this wonderful title embodies?

Yes.

I decided to re-visit this book after having read it around 3 years ago (before my reviewing habit kicked in) because I remembered it being an instant favorite but didn't remember why exactly. I had some vague notions of course, but pinpointing the thing that drew me in, really making a case for why others should read it as well, I could not. Can I do it now?

No. But I'll try anyway.

What I can say is that this is:

- a. the best Murakami I've read;
- b. a superb introduction to this great author.

While in the other books I've read by him it felt as if all the characters were conspiring to make things as strange as possible for the reader, thinking so far outside of the box the mere notion of a box seemed ludicrous, in this one they seem more sympathetic. Especially the protagonist. He seems like he's a good friend of Murakami, introducing him to you, but regardless of their bond, the main character is on your side. When Murakami comes up with something fantastical, he'll go with it, sure, but not without raising his eyebrows to you, signaling "I don't know what the hell is going on either, but it's fun, right?"

Yes, yes it is my friend. And the complicity between the protagonist and the reader will be the thing holding you in your seat when the Murakami rollercoaster ride gets really wild and upside down.

I don't want to give away too many details on the story, I think it's best discovered by reading it for yourself in all its glory. It deals with one of my favorite topics: the mind, its powers, its mysteries, its pitfalls. The joys of losing yourself in thought, the dangers of a closed mind, the connections with the heart: they're all poured into wonderful metaphors that together make for a great adventure.

The novel alternates between two settings: **the Hard-Boiled Wonderland** and *the End of the World*.

Which is real? What is their connection? Can both exist in harmony?

Which would you rather live in? A place of passions and dangers, but only for a limited time? Or a place of peace and tranquility, forever? Is an answer even possible?

Not in my book, maybe in this one. The unnamed protagonist in this story tries to answer these questions in the midst of information wars between the System and the Factory, in a village completely surrounded and isolated by an impenetrable Wall, in a race against time, running from sinister enemies in underground tunnels, all the while trying to make sure his shadow can keep up. I tried to cover a lot of what's in the story here, but I didn't even come close to getting it all. This isn't the kind of story that can be summarized into a

blurb.

It's exciting. It's deep. It's funny. Its settings are mysterious and thought-provoking. Oh, and there's a map! I love stories that come with maps. There was a lot of time spent simply gazing at that map, imagining to walk the river shores into the woods, dreaming away.

In short: an all-time favorite. It also has my favorite quote of all time.

A quote on how everything is fine. And always will be.

Take a moment, sit back, relax, and read these words that never fail to impress me, no matter how many times I've read them:

"The sun sliced through the windshield, sealing me in light. I closed my eyes and felt the warmth on my eyelids. Sunlight traveled a long distance to reach this planet; an infinitesimal portion of that sunlight was enough to warm my eyelids. I was moved. That something as insignificant as an eyelid had its place in the workings on the universe, that the cosmic order did not overlook this momentary fact."

Reading this book has been like soft rays of sunshine finding their way to my eyelids, an experience I wish to highly recommend to everyone.

Kenny says

3.5/5 Buddy read with my friend Sr?an.

"Unclose your mind. You are not a prisoner. You are a bird in flight, searching the skies for dreams."
? Haruki Murakami, **Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World**

There is so much to say about **Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World**, I'm just not certain I'm the one to say it. I was never able to quite connect with the characters or the plot on an emotional level. Part of the problem is that Murakami attempts to blend so many many different literary genres and only partially succeeds here. Is this a hard-boiled detective novel, or a sci-fi novel? Is it a romance novel or dystopian fiction? I'm not sure even Murakami himself can answer that. And to make matters more confusing, Murakami threw some fantasy in here for good measure along with a dash of cold war spy thrillers. It is obvious, that Murakami has a love for the hard-boiled detective novels of the 30's, 40's and 50's, and while his **Hard-Boiled Wonderland** portion of the book is interesting, it's also obvious that Murakami has a lot to learn from Phillip Marlow.

Another issue with the **Hard-Boiled Wonderland** portion of the book, are the random references to Western culture sprinkled throughout the book. References are made to films, movie stars and musicians for no reason other than to reference them. These references do nothing to further the story in any way, yet paragraphs and even pages are given over to them.

Confused? So was Murakami. And yet, this book is fascinating. I could not put it down.

Murakami promises much in this work. And, to be honest, he delivers much. Murakami's Tokyo is a wonderland. And we do end up at venturing to the end of the world. Along the way we encounter unicorns, gangsters, mad scientists, chubby girls clad in pink, subterranean monsters, seductive librarians, dream readers, mysterious forests, and the hallucinogenic effects of music between the mind and the sub-conscious mind.

Adding to this wonderland is the Calcutec's penis. There is tremendous interest his manhood and it keeps popping up at the most inconvenient moments.

Where Murakami best succeeds is with the **End of the World** portion of the book. It is a stark contrast to the neon saturated, Tokyo of Murakami's wonderland. In this world people surrender their shadows, extract and read dreams and live in fear of a mysterious wall. Yet even in this drab world, the characters we encounter are no less colorful. Here, Murakami's writing is unencumbered by the ghosts of Marlow, Cain, Bradbury, Jung and le Carré.

Upon finishing the book I was bothered with the lack of an ending. Characters disappeared for no reason. Plots were dropped as quickly as they appeared. The book was overwritten and in need of editing, and still the ending was rushed.

This was only my third Murakami, and second full-length novel of his. So, I am still quite new to his work. While I found the book to be utterly fascinating, I am certain it is far from his best work.

In the end, I do recommend this book. Even second rate Murakami is better than many writers best efforts.

Andrew says

This is your brain (an egg). This is your brain on Murakami (an egg sprouting arms and legs and attempting to hump other eggs while doing the Electric Slide and attempting to save the world to a killer soundtrack).

If you like Murakami, you'll like it, although it doesn't blend the two twisted sides of Murakami's writing as well as a book like "Norwegian Wood" or "Kafka on the Shore." In each of those novels, the reader gets transitions within chapters, and his talents for myth-telling in both the mystical and mundane worlds is woven together like two different colored pieces of yarn, fraying and blending at the end. A depressed hippy juggles his daily life - student and record-store shop employee who occasionally trolls for women with his amoral college roommate - with his intensely personal life - a boy growing into a man, learning about love, heartbreak and death. A talking cat accompanies a small boy on his adventures, the boy eating a lot of diner food and not really doing much but hanging out at the library. These are the things you get with Murakami, but they usually coexist fairly nicely, driving toward a space where fantasy and reality decide to have a nice conversation.

"Hard Boiled Wonderland And The End Of The World" is aptly titled, because it really is two separate stories - the "And" is paramount - they are woven together, but more like two noodles can be woven together, but never quite mesh. Oddly, the formal structure of the book - one chapter in reality, one chapter in myth - lends itself to reading the two stories as each lending to the other, but one could almost (until the very end) read each one as independent of the other. Murakami's "reality" is far-flung and outlandish, but it obeys its own rules, and takes the reader for a nice tragic ride. The "myth" is much more prosaic and sedate, but is clearly too serene to be reality. Perhaps it is Murakami's commentary on life: truth is stranger than fiction, especially when the fiction is based on the truth is based on the fiction...

The novel could be an ouroboros, but instead it is a little like the hospital symbol of a serpent wrapped about a knife. To understand this, read the book. I can't describe it any better than this. It gets a four, because it's frankly a little too self-reflexive for me - no main character should really ever say, "Stuff like this only happens in novels," as far as I'm concerned - but it is a stylistic precursor to Murakami's most famous and best work (that I've read), "Kafka on the Shore," so you get to see how Murakami's style evolves, a dualistic peek into the development of a dichotomous author.

Tara says

"More often than not I've observed that convenient approximations bring you closest to comprehending the true nature of things."

3.5 stars. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*'s strange, playful investigation into the complexities of the mind was innovative, thought-provoking and, quite often, utterly charming. Here dualism, which often runs the risk of oversimplification and hence of becoming uninspired (and ultimately uninteresting), instead functioned in a manner that was both enchanting and illuminating. To borrow from the above quote, it acted as a convenient approximation that brings the reader closer to comprehending the nature of consciousness, intelligence, memory, identity, and what it truly means to be human, to be alive. Conceptually speaking, the book was richly layered, intriguing, and generally very impressive.

The reason I'm not rating it any higher is, I believe, purely subjective: I wasn't too keen on spending time in *The End of the World*, which is one of the two worlds that comprise the book. Many other readers, however, absolutely loved it there, so I'm fairly certain that my lack of enthusiasm reflects my own personal taste more than anything else. While I appreciated the realm's role in the overall plot, it just didn't grab me. I couldn't really connect with it, and so reading about it always left me underwhelmed, eager to get back to the more captivating weirdness of the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. That world, on the other hand, was great fun to explore; I related to the protagonist, and enjoyed the humor, peculiar story, and hard-boiled writing style. I'd heard before that Murakami was influenced by Raymond Chandler, and that was readily apparent here. I'm a Chandler fan myself, and I loved how Murakami creatively and mischievously interwove the strands of cynicism and witty one-liners into his bizarre, surreal wonderland. Oddly enough, these two seemingly incompatible flavors actually complemented each other rather well.

On the whole, this was an inventive, skillfully constructed story. Its enigmatic atmosphere was wistful and dreamlike, very difficult to describe. And it ended on a gently haunting, beautiful note. When I put the book down, I felt both dejected and fulfilled at the same time. Pretty fitting, of course. So don't let my somewhat

lackluster rating deter you from giving this curious novel a try. If nothing else, you'll definitely view paperclips in a new light from now on. I hear that a lifetime supply isn't too expensive...

RandomAnthony says

The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World gets my vote the most unique and frustrating book in the Murakami catalog. I got the feeling that there's a little bit of the fan in Murakami in this text; his love of PK Dick, Vonnegut, etc. seems present, and I imagine passages of the book were great fun to write as a tribute, if you will, to his influences. However, the cold, metallic neurophysiology, whether accurate or not (I don't know much about brain chemistry, so I can't say one way or the other) left me, for the first time in my long history with the author, hoping a long, clinical section near the middle of the book would end quickly. Luckily, the material bracketing that extended passage was strong although perhaps not coherent enough to place this book amongst Murakami's best.

The book focuses in some ways on the conscious/unconscious reality/perceptual ground familiar to readers of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *After Dark*. Murakami changes the context from the isolation of the well or mysterious rooms one can only sometimes enter to a place where brains are modified in ways that bridge or fail to bridge the conscious and unconscious minds for strategic purposes. In other words, Murakami places this book's world, for better or for worse, firmly in the land of science fiction. The "other" realm, full of unicorns, retired generals, and demure librarians, is a rich, thoughtful meditation on the ways in which different parts of our consciousness interact. College students looking for term paper fodder related to fiction and Jung/Campbell would have a field day with this book.

But does that make for a great Murakami novel? No. While (in my eyes, and I know Murakami is one of those "love/hate" goodreads authors) most of the author's work is transcendent and inspiring, *The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* earns those descriptors on rare and brief occasions. The book is good, interesting, even, but serves more as an intellectual exercise than a fun, "this is why I love books" read. For fans only.

Brooke says

I'd previously read two Haruki Murakami novels, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and *After Dark*, his earliest and most recent that have been translated into English, respectively. After hearing about how he was one of Japan's most beloved authors, I was really underwhelmed by those two offerings. *Sheep* was almost too bizarre to really appreciate, and *After Dark* was short and enjoyable, but nothing special. After reading *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, however, I suddenly Got It.

The title refers to the two portions of the book - Hardboiled Wonderland is about a man who mentally processes information for a living - it's vaguely sci-fi-ish, but not enough to turn off readers who aren't interested in sci-fi. This nameless man finds himself running for his life underground when various groups suddenly decide they want him for their purposes. The End of the World is about a man who suddenly arrives in a unicorn-filled town that is surrounded by a Wall. He doesn't know how he got there or where he was before, and he must have his shadow cut away from him in order to live within the Wall. The novel goes

back and forth between each half, which eventually start to tie together.

It's kind of similar to Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, but that comparison will only take you so far. Murakami's nameless protagonists are more introspective than Gaiman's Richard Mayhew, and in the end, the focus is on what's going on within, rather than the action outside.

Despite flipping back and forth between the two halves, the novel flows very well. It kept my attention so well that I was eagerly looking forward to picking it up each time I had a chance to read, which is something I haven't felt about the last half-dozen or so books I've read. The novel was written in 1985, but other than the mention of cassettes, there was no sign that it was written over twenty years ago.

I'm really glad I didn't give up on Murakami after being disappointed by his first two that I read. Hopefully the rest of his books will hold some of the magic that *Hardboiled Wonderland* has, because I'll really feel let down if I go back to being underwhelmed again.

Michael says

I'm sorry this one didn't get on my radar sooner. It's quintessential Murakami, blending genres in his signature weird and wonderful way—fantasy, sci fi, noir, fable, magical realism.

This novel from 1985 gives us a dystopia and a utopia for the price of one. In the former, our unnamed, thirty-something male protagonist works as a contracted Calcutec in Tokyo, a human encrypting device for the sanctioned espionage group, the System. Their main enemy in the “Infowar” are the Semiotecs, which serve the shadowy, illegal forces known as the Factory. The man takes on a job for a brilliant, maverick scientist (the “Professor”) whose recent discoveries have him hiding out from both factions in an underground redoubt far beneath the streets of Tokyo. These chapters alternate with a world where the protagonist is newly arrived with no memories in a town isolated behind a high wall (the “Town”, the “Wall”). The Gatekeeper forces him to part with his shadow (sure, why not, it doesn’t hurt), and he assumes his job as a Dreamreader, experiencing the shreds of human memories and dreams from unicorn skulls housed in the Town Library. Nice to have a job lined up, so go with the flow. He soon succumbs to the peaceful patterns of existence of this world and the kindness of people devoted to their various jobs such as keeping the town running, harvesting resources, and tending to the herds of unicorn beasts.

We know we are in for a ride when we first follow our cool, unflappable hero from an austere modern office on a long journey to the underworld in the escort of the Professor’s teen grand-daughter and learn she has to use sign language to guide him because the scientist has somehow erased sound. And that the dark passages through caverns along an underground river are infested with dangerous swarms of creatures (“INKlings”) unleashed by the Factory forces. And that the man’s password for initiating the use of his brain for encoding the Professor’s top secret information is “End of the World.” Soon he learns he is part of an experiment, and that the secret everyone is after lies in new capabilities of his brain and mind and that time is running short to figure it out and take meaningful action. The Professor has given him the gift of a skull, which he figures is an important clue, and he spends a lot of time with a seductive librarian woman trying to identify it. Meanwhile, in the walled town, the man there also is working with skulls and developing a relationship with a librarian. And time is running short for him to figure out the town—should he try to escape before his shadow dies?

As a reader, I became hungry myself to understand these mysteries and the link between the two worlds. But

all along the way I wanted to linger with the vitality of the warm-hearted characters experienced by the questing dual protagonists. There is much delight in simple pleasures of food and drink, affection and lust, and humor in playful conversation. In the dystopian world these pleasures are contrasted by many outside threats, while in the utopian world the promise of timelessness poses a more internal threat to their reality.

There are plenty of interludes for philosophical discussions that spin naturally out of the systems of the two worlds in the same way as Plato used his famous cave as a prop for posing fundamental questions. Some of these reflections are lighter than other. For example, our hero of the Tokyo Infowars is constantly spinning off reflections from old movies, songs, and books. He can spin a bit of aesthetic philosophy so simply:

Whiskey, like a beautiful woman, demands appreciation. You gaze first, then it's time to drink.

He is a cool customer, so casually brave in situations of danger, but he is quite conscious sometimes of a profound emptiness at his core:

My life is nothing, I thought. Zero. Zilch. A blank. What have I done with my life? Not a damned thing. I had no home. I had no family. I had no friends. Not a door to my name. Not an erection either. Pretty soon, not even a job.

His awareness of his flaws makes him sympathetic to losers in literature, especially in Turgenev and Stendhal. For example, he identifies with Julien Sorel in “The Red and the Black”:

Sorel's basic character flaws had all cemented by the age of fifteen, a fact which further elicited my sympathy. To have all the building blocks of your life in place by that age was, by any standards, a tragedy. It was as good as sealing yourself into a dungeon Walled in, with nowhere to go but your own doom.

Much more discussion by the characters in both worlds concern the nature of the mind and identity, their dependence on time and memory, and the reality of the unconscious. I won't spoil the fun here, but I will tantalize you with some out-of-context nuggets:

Without the mind, nothing leads anywhere.

It's not so strange that when your memories change, the world changes.

As you create memories, you're creating a parallel world.

...we all carry around this great unexplored 'elephant graveyard' inside us. Outer space inside, this is truly humanity's last terra incognita. ... 'Tisn't a burial ground for collected dead memories. An 'elephant factory' is more like it. There's where you sort through countless memories and bits of knowledge, arrange the sorted chips into complex lines, combine these lines into more complex bundles, and finally make up a cognitive system. A veritable production line, with you as the boss. Unfortunately, though, the factory floor is off-limits.

Of course, ever since the modern age, science has stressed the physiological spontaneity of the human organism, But as soon's we start askin' just what this spontaneity is, nobody can come up with a decent answer. Nobody's got the keys t'the elephant factory inside us. Freud and Jung and all the rest of them published their theories, but all they did was t'invent a lot of jargon t'get people talkin'. Gave mental phenomena a little scholastic color.

Humans are immortal in their thought. Though strictly speakin', not immortal, but endlessly, asymptotically

close to immortal.

There's no time to tautologies. That's the difference between tautologies and dreams. Tautologies are instantaneous, everything is revealed at once. Eternity can actually be experienced.

I am a fan of science fiction, and this tale has enough scientific hand-waving to tickle the same pleasures I got from Stephenson's cyberpunk tale "Snow Crash". The fun wasn't from the plausibility of the premise (that a computer virus that could infect human communication in the latter), but all the shenanigans that were built on it. You probably guess already that the utopian world here is an imaginary world from the perspective of the "real" world set in Tokyo. But it's brilliant to me how Murakami can us get twisted up in the prospect of such an imagined world having an epistemic reality, when both his worlds are so chock full of fantasy elements anyway. Simply delicious. It's of the same order as the mind frackin of Mieville's "The City and the City", but a lot more satisfying in it's cohesiveness and playfulness.

Ben says

Whew, blew me away. The influences from Orwell and Kafka are clearly here. Existential meditations, amazingly imaginative, the multitude of interesting and important thoughts that can sprout from the reader's mind. The whole thing is pure genius.

"That's the way it is with the mind. Nothing is ever equal. Like a river, as it flows, the course changes with the terrain."

Typically, Murakami works his way through your subconscious, toying with recognitions of the past and future, in that magical state much like a dream (but slightly different), where you lose time, and explore and recognize parts of yourself; all while occasionally getting hit with an outburst of powerful consciousness. Some of his novels (*Norwegian Wood* and *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, for example), play with the more sentimental sections of the subconscious; but this, this is an overt exploration of the dreamlike state -- an ingenious, different world with human beings with human thoughts and emotions like us, yes. But really you're thrown into two different surreal lands, both existing simultaneously; one world in which life is more "real" than the other; that, we assume as our base, or our "reality." In that reality, we have our narrator: our narrator has run into an amoral, genius scientist, who plays with our narrator's brain. In the subconscious of our narrator's brain, we have our "other world" (also known as "the end of the world"). This is the world that seems less real. It is a world where people have literally lost their minds. No, they aren't crazy: in fact, it's just the opposite. Without their own minds, they have no meaningful life; no strong emotion-- no music. No love. Just work. In "reality" our narrator has a limited amount of time before he falls into his subconscious (the end of the world?) and lives there eternally. In his subconscious world, he is trying to escape, and has limited amount of time to do so, there, as well.

Of course, no plot summary can do this book justice-- it's full of thought provoking nuance, and is probably best read twice.

"It's not so strange that when your memories change, the world changes."

There are a number of different theories that come to mind after finishing this. Some are still hitting me, and you know what? Each theory is fascinating and important in its own way. I don't want to put any spoilers in

here, but I'd love to discuss this novel with anyone else who has read it.

Jr Bacdayan says

You're taking a shower. Two streams fall onto you at the same time. One stream is cold and revitalizing while the other is hot and soothing. One's heat fills the room with a foggy mist while the other clears your head driving it awake with its coldness. Each one supplements the other and the effect creates an experience more complete than had the two not been together. An icy torrent showing how crystal clear things are, and a scorching torrent enveloping things with a blanket of moisture, both drive together to reveal you in your truest form and cleanse you of any impurity and grime.

In Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World Murakami once again presents parallel stories as he'd done in more famous works like Kafka On The Shore and Sputnik Sweetheart. But somehow in this book more than in any of his other works the relation between the two narrations is more personal; one could even describe it as intimate. And as you progress with your reading, you do realize the implications of each story to the other. And you start to appreciate the duality that Murakami has created across a single thread of consciousness. You nod approvingly and realize what intricate, delicate, fragile string must hold the entire account together. Murakami's genius cannot be denied.

In this novel that moves from beasts to coding to information laundering to anatomy, paperclips and pre-70s pop culture and many other disparate themes one shines a light and sees the conscious self above all only to realize the unconscious self is holding the lantern. This book is probably what it'd feel like to be in a dark room and then stumble onto a mirror and by moonlight see the reflection of your brain exposed jutting out of a gape in your skull. You do not fully know yourself, not even you know who you truly are. Your unconscious is some dark place probably filled with unicorns. Don't try to understand it. Realize the significance that there is some part of you, you don't control. Accept that life is mysterious and so are you. But hey I've never really been a connoisseur of the subconscious; I've got no solid background aside from the standard Freud and Jung. Who am I to tell you who you are? I'm here just urging you maybe get to know yourself a little better. You'd be surprised. You're more than a just a box of chocolates, as our friend Forrest would put it. Hey you're another world entirely. You're like the cross between Stendhal, Dylan, and that attractive person from the gym. You're the man in black, the woman in pink, that dude that shocked the world. You're whatever you want to be and something else entirely. Appreciate yourself, what you know, what you don't.

Sometimes I come across people who try to read Murakami because they think his books are 'Instagram worthy.' They say he's 'deep' and 'aesthetic' and he writes relatable things and he's famous so he has to be good. But these readers often end up confused more than anything. There's nothing sadder than someone being forced to read a book maybe because of pretensions or maybe because of peer pressure. Who knows? But if I know anything, and I'm not sure I do, literature should be happily undertaken and seen as some sort of reprieve from our taxing world and not as some sort of chore to sink your teeth into and forcefully finish. Reading an unwanted book probably does your unconscious more harm than it does your conscious good. But consider reading this book. You'll probably enjoy yourself. If you didn't, well, at least you tried. But remember to read for yourself, because you want to. Don't read because I told you or somebody else did, or because you want to look good in the eyes of other people. There's nothing more unfitting than reading this book because of anybody else.

At some part of the book Murakami writes ‘I am here alone at the furthest periphery of existence. Here the world expires and is still.’ This offers us a certain sort of clarity. A lot of the things we do, we do because others expect from us. Because we have responsibilities to family, to friends, to loved ones. We do because we don’t want to hurt others. But when all of that is cleared away, sometimes the things we do for others hurt the self we’ve hidden away. There are times the self is harmed by what’s good for everyone else. But not only that, it can be that the self is dictated by those around it. Maybe you do not realize but you like what you like because your friends like it too. Maybe your favorite book is only your favorite because your partner likes it as well. Maybe who you are is entirely based on who your friends and family are. The identity you’ve built dependent and patterned to those around you. And so when the world is stripped off, when you are alone far from everyone else, who are you? What is it that you like? What makes you happy? What drives you? Do you know?

This is a novel that stirs the depths of consciousness and looks into the self unlike any other. It’s a rewarding experience that unmasks a man and his daily repetitive activities to show the depths of who we are and the gravity of balance between our many facets.

Get in touch with yourself, with the truest self you can access and discover. Spend some time alone. Figure out what you want. Learn to love and appreciate who you are. You might be surprised.

Stephen M says

Right Brain

Upon the fields, yet of no snow,
frolic an acquiescence we yet to sow,
brilliant beasts, their golden fleece ready to unfurl,
trod this place, the end of the world.

Upon this fantasy, comes one of two
unnamed narrators who works in lieu
of status, volition; vagueness washes his mind,
all Kafkaesque, he becomes a dream-reading blind.

On a lost elevator in the counterpart plane
all events are concurrent and faintly the same;
the dyadic complement of the twin conscious
is a tech-savvy tokyoite obsessing on pink paunches.

Cracking the code of the city’s underground
in fits of silence and mercurial sounds
He loses his mind all *Betty Davis style*
while *voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while.*

The world unveils more pairs of people,
twin librarians, old men and a gatekeeper
who unlock their world in all its furious meaning
a sci-fi noir completes a fantasy of dreaming.

Who knew what convolution of dreams and ideas
could bring about such a spectrum of feelings?
As is this masterpiece that I've become most fond of,
Sekai no owari to h?do-boirudo wand?rando
