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Through The Arc Of The Rain Forest



Synopsis

Through the Arc of the Rain Forest is a burlesque of comic-strip adventures and apocalyptic portents that stretches familiar truths to their logical extreme in a future world that is just recognizable enough to be frightening. In the Author's Note," Karen Tei Yamashita writes that her book is like a Brazilian soap opera called a novela: "the novela's story is completely changeable according to the whims of the public psyche and approval, although most likely, the unhappy find happiness; the bad are punished; true love reigns; a popular actor is saved from death ... an idyll striking innocence, boundless nostalgia and terrible ruthlessness." The stage is a vast, mysterious field of impenetrable plastic in the Brazilian rain forest set against a backdrop of rampant environmental destruction, commercialization, poverty, and religious rapture. Through the Arc of the Rainforest is narrated by a small satellite hovering permanently around the head of an innocent character named Kazumasa. Through no fault of his own, Kazumasa seems to draw strange and significant people into his orbit and to find himself at the center of cataclysmic events that involve carrier pigeons, religious pilgrims, industrial espionage, magic feathers, big money, miracles, epidemics, true love, and the virtual end of the world. This book is simultaneously entertaining and depressing, with all the rollicking pessimism you'd expect of a good soap opera or a good political satire."- Kirsten Backstrom, 500 Great Books by Women

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This satiric morality play about the destruction of the rain forest unfolds with a diversity and fecundity equal to its setting. First-novelist Yamashita blends the matter-of-fact surrealism of Garcia

Marquez, bizarre science fiction twists a la Stanislaw Lem, and a gift for satirizing bureaucracy that recalls Heller of *Catch 22* --all in a Chaucerian framework. But in the end it is the author's unique voice that emerges. A Japanese-American who has lived in Los Angeles and Brazil, Yamashita seems to have thrown into the pot everything she knows and most that she can imagine--all to good effect. The cast includes: the unusual narrator, a small ball that whirls near the forehead of a Japanese living in Brazil; American Jonathan B. Tweep, a three-armed businessman who develops the Theory of Trialectics; Mane Pena, who makes his fortune through "Featherology," the art of healing with feathers; and a couple whose pigeon-raising hobby turns into a national obsession and big business. The seemingly disparate plot lines converge explosively in the rain forest on the Matacao, a mysterious shiny plateau that at first offers wealth and miracles, and eventually death and disaster. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This expansive and ambitious novel attempts, fairly successfully, to weave an immediate concern for the environment with an incredible and complicated story. The setting is the Brazilian jungle, and the cast of characters could people a circus: a middle-aged Japanese man with a golf ball-sized sphere buzzing in front of his forehead, a three-armed executive from New York, an old man who founds the "science" of featherology, and a boy who is believed to be an angel--to name just a few. These characters converge, each with a separate mission, on the unique "natural" phenomenon known as the Matacao, a huge flat plastic plain in the middle of the jungle. Boundless greed and the unthinking destruction of our environment are as much a part of the story as the delicate relations among the characters. Although the clever parodies of modern society (from yuppies to New Age spiritualism to animal rights groups) are a bit heavy-handed, and at times the plot bogs down in its own intricacies, this is ultimately enjoyable reading.- Jessica Grim, Univ. of California at Berkeley Lib. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A very enjoyable read. This book reminds me of those strange and meandering novels (like Tom Robbins) except with an environmental bent, but not with the heavy-laden activist tone of early Carl Hiaasen. It is a great book with several interweaving plots and quite a bit of magical realism. Some parts of it are laugh out loud funny. Yamashita is an interesting writer; while one of the protagonists is Japanese (and this takes place in the Japanese expatriate community in Brazil), this is not necessarily an Asian-American book. I have heard however her say in interviews that she completely identifies herself as an Asian-American author - I wonder if that is pointing to the new globalism/cosmopolitan trend we're seeing nowadays. It's a fun read regardless of your political or

racial proclivities so I would pick it up if you're a fan of Robbins, Pynchon, maybe even David Foster Wallace (lite) and others. It explores interesting ideas in science, religion, and throws in some corporate irresponsibility for good measure. Overall a very memorable book and one of my new favorites.

This novel is a hoot. Yamashita's free-wheeling black comedy satirizes most aspects of post-modern life: media, fads, environment, corporations, televangelists. It's all there in this "Russian novel on crack."

great required book for a film and literature culture class. I'd recommend. The author teaches at UC Santa Cruz too!

A junk drawer of whimsy, corny jokes, and oddly placed didacticism.

very nice

This order was shipped diligently and I recieved it within 3 days of ordering it!

I have heard Brazilian children say that whatever passes through the arc of the rainbow becomes its opposite. But what is the opposite of a bird? Or for that matter, a human being? And what then, in the great rainforest, where, in its season, the rain never ceases and the rainbows are myriad? This epigraph precedes Karen Yamashita's novel, "Through the Arc of the Rain Forest." Yamashita's novel focuses on the journey of Kasumasa Ishimaru as narrated by a ball revolving several inches from Kasumasa's head. The examination of this piece, however, will revolve (literally and figuratively) on the motif of a rainbow through different parts of the novel, including the epigraph. Yamashita uses rainbows and arcs as symbols relating to consistent negative and positive patterns, imagery, and meanings within the novel. The first introduction of the rainbow as a symbol occurs when Kasumasa encounters American J.B. Tweep, who is employed within a company Kasumasa holds controlling stock. J.B. chides Kasumasa into searching for more Matacao, which is the material that will create economic profit for Kasumasa's conglomerate. Within their search, J.B. Tweep hides protagonist Kasumaza Ishimaru from his competition. Tweep's undercover agents had been described as hiding themselves "at the arc of every rainbow" (149). The rainbow in this sense takes the meaning of a vast, unending space. The percieved sense of unrest, searching, and

mystery contrasts the allusion of a peaceful rainbow. The arc represents an unexplainable plain which can be pilfered for special interest. In this instance, the rainbow does not take the shape of a beautiful vision, but rather a vision of greed and deception. The journey from new to old and back again to new is another presentation of the rainbow as an arc, a curving storyline with a significant purpose. Yamashita explains, "The old forest has returned once again...pursuing the lost perfection of an organism in which digestion and excretion ! were once one and the same." (212) The forest in this setting has been destroyed by extraordinary events. However, the forest continues to grow, to recycle. The theme of recycling and a cyclical pattern echo from this passage. Where a circle is said to have "no start and no end," an allusion is made towards a pattern of infinite possibilities and of rebirth and regeneration. To give a greater context in the presentation of the rainbow as a symbol, one need not look further than the table of contents. The contents are broken up in six parts: The Beginning, The Developing World, More Development, Loss of Innocence, More Loss, and Return. Through careful examination, the pattern of an arc is presented through the first three parts relating to the setting and inciting incident and the last three parts regarding climax and conclusion. The first parts correlate to the rise of an arc, and the last parts correlate to the fall of the arc. In essence, the plot of the novel is like an arc, a rainbow-like pattern filled with emotional leaps and downfalls, of stunning portrayal and imaginative resolution. The epigraph ties the novel neatly by discussing the rainbow as a symbol. The epigraph is directed through rumor, question, and pending answer, much like an arc. The breakdown of the epigraph is made to mirror the story. The rumor of Brazilian children within the epigraph relates directly to the rumors spread by the many characters within the early part of the novel, whether the rumor is contrived by the Brazilian people from Kasumasa's ball, J.B. Tweep three arms, or Mane Pena's feather use. The questions arise within the epigraph to symbolize the characters' situation, to find methods of practicality or exploitation of the rumors. In one such case, Kasumasa gives his riches to both needy and greedy, many people within the novel question his motives including Kasumasa questioning his own motives. The pending answer within the epigraph relates to the ultimate destruction of the rain forest, the final answer to human waste and stupidity. The rainbow, through a final analysis resonates as a symbol for identity formation. Kasumasa is seen as an Asian American subject, even though his journey takes place in Brazil. In the context of whatever passes through the "rainbow becomes its opposite," Kasumasa symbolizes that choices can not be simplified to a basic premise of either/or, to whether Kasumasa is Asian or Brazilian, that a literary work is Asian American or not. Therefore, a rainbow's own identity can also be seen within the same light: multicolored to escape a single colored dimension; untouchable to resist a concrete ownership or state of being; unending to prevent an imaged start and finish.

I suggest reading this book with as open a mind as possible, or else you'll find yourself completely lost in the alternate reality of three-armed characters, clones, and orbs that float in front of heads and narrate stories. Despite not being too fond of the book, I did find it an oddly grasping novel and a quick read. The underlying tones of globalization can easily be lost to most readers.

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