

# arts

## A Japanese sci-fi detective story

by Robert Currie

Fiction at the end of the 20th century is as much about combination as it is about innovation. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World* is part *Maltese Falcon*, part *Blade Runner*, with echoes from almost every other surface of 20th century popular culture.

Haruki Murakami, one of Japan's best-selling novelists, writes in a perversely alluring style blending the minimalism of the hard-boiled detective novel, the techo-obsession of cyberpunk and the dream logic of well-made fantasy.

*I gave myself a quick shampoo and all-over scrub, brushed my teeth, and shaved. Then I pulled on underpants and slacks. Despite all that crazy chasing around, my gut actually felt better; I hardly remembered the wound until I got into the tub.*

*Hard-Boiled's* unnamed protagonist is a Calcutech, a member of an almost monastic order specialising in the encryption of sensitive information. Their opponents are the Semitechs, data pirates just as de-

voted to stealing information as the Calcutechs are to safeguarding it. The nameless Calcutech lives what he takes to be a routine life of self-imposed solitude. But a routine job starts the countdown to a personal apocalypse when he comes to aid a recluse who lives below the streets of Tokyo.

The drama in Tokyo (*Hard-Boiled Wonderland*) alternates with the story of a mysterious, Kafka-esque village, populated by unicorns, shadows and willing prisoners. The name of the village is "The End of The World." The two plots run on a collision course, with the Calcutech at the intersection.

Murakami's prose can be slow to warm to. *Hard-Boiled* is translated from the Japanese, and like many translations, lacks some of the snap and crispness we expect from a novelist. But the sparse prose eventually proves itself; the reader never gets buried in gadgetry or scientific speculation.

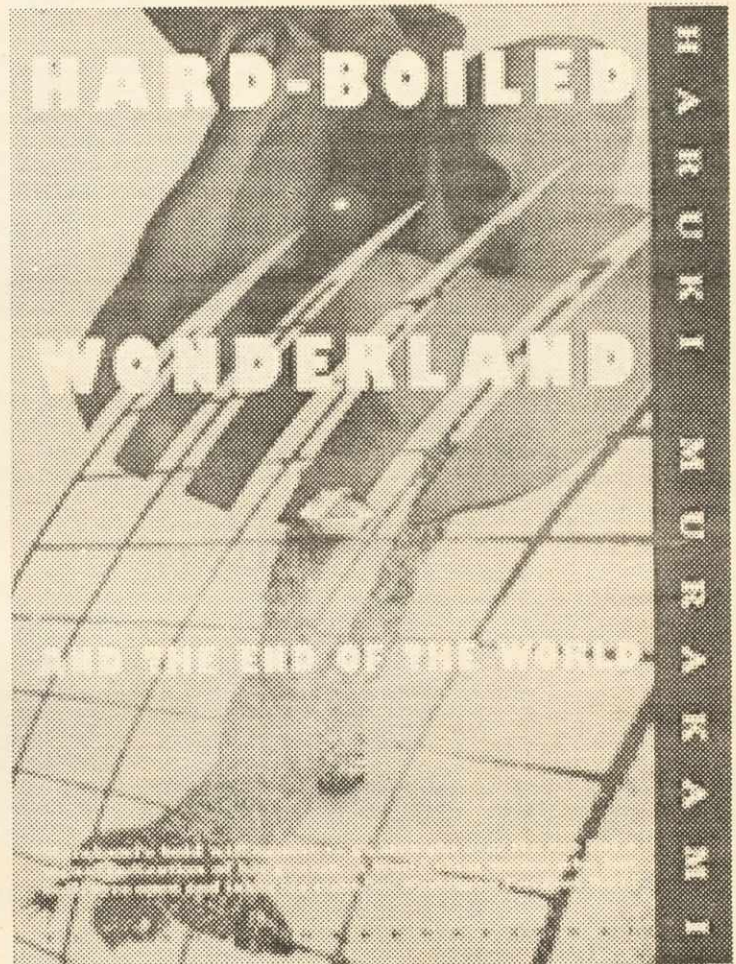
As a hard-boiled detective thriller, *Hard-Boiled* hits all the right notes. There is the Mysterious Client, the

Femme Fatale, and what hard-boiled novel would be complete without the Goons Trash the Apartment scene. Murakami has seen all the same movies we have.

Post Modern Coolness

But what saves *Hard-Boiled* from becoming just a pastiche is Murakami's ironic sensibility. His cool, controlled prose, a jarring ability to mix diverse styles makes *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World* simultaneously grim and funny, a cool, postmodern excursion into an alternate present tense.

Murakami is not the inventor of the science fiction detective novel, but *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is not about invention. It is about renovation, about making the cliches of science fiction and detective thrillers newly interesting, and in this Murakami succeeds. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World* is thoughtful, entertaining, and, in an understated way, witty. While the hard-boiled hero has seen it all before, reading *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World* makes it seem it all again worthwhile.



An eggcellent fantasy tale.

## Developing a mutual musical flow

by Emily Macnaughton

"A few persons are trying to save the shore, some of those persons are A.D... We can stop being washed away" ~ Arrested Development

Arrested Development  
*Three Years, Five Months and Two Days in the Life of Chrysalis*

*Three years, Five Months and Two Days in the Life of.*, the debut album by group Arrested Development, is fresh, earnest music from idealistic, playful performers. Self-described as "20th Century Africans" making "Life Music", the group fuses country blues, African rhythms, funk bass-lines and hip-hop beats with critical, socially-conscious lyrics insisting "You Got to get political".

Arrested Development, a six member band from Georgia, is made up of men and women under the age of 24.

Speech, the lead singer, becomes the focal point of the songs; the other members work their voices and sounds around his constant rap. The album is like an animated conversation; the experimentation with word and sound never lets up for an instant.

The band's cooperation and album-oriented approach are closely

tied to their visions and ideals. *Three Years* is an appeal for a stronger black. Their group interaction is similar to groups like Sly and the Family Stone where the end musical result comes through their sense of mutual responsibility to the flow of the album's spontaneous, jam session feel. Along with typical rap sampling and scratching, their songs are scattered with harmonica wails, thumping pianos and blasts of saxophone. It's rap that got tired of the city and headed for the country.

**"It's rap... that headed for the country."**

community, not just musical but religious, social and political.

In "Mama's Always on Stage", the group offers to help raise the baby of a struggling young mother; in "Fishin' 4 Religion", they criticize the Baptist church for not playing a stronger role in the community; "U" underlines the need for understanding and respect for women in marriages and relationships. "Mr. Wendel" describes the nobility of a street person: "Uncivilized we call him but I just

saw him eat off the food we waste".

The songs plead for a simpler life, for respect for life and the living. They also insist on working for positive change: "You can't be passive/gotta be active".

*Three Years...* attacks racism, the uselessness of churches and universities as educators; describes violent confrontations, reveals the foolishness and hypocrisy of our so-called

values; in short, it's an angry album. But it's a focussed anger - a fresh, youthful outcry with plans and solutions.

Arrested Development's first album is refreshing and hopeful product from a band stuffed with potential. It's about survival through togetherness, criticism and reform. *Three Years...* is tribute to strength of its musical community. The vision inspires and hey - you can dance to it too.

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