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Sinopsis

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A surreal coming-of-age tale that establishes Ryu Murakami as one of the most inventive young writers in the world today.

Abandoned at birth in adjacent train station lockers, two troubled boys spend their youth in an orphanage and with foster parents on a semi-deserted island before finally setting off for the city to find and destroy the women who first rejected them. Both are drawn to an area of freaks and hustlers called Toxittown. One becomes a bisexual rock singer, star of this exotic demimonde, while the other, a pole vaulter, seeks his revenge in the company of his girlfriend, Anemone, a model who has converted her condominium into a tropical swamp for her pet crocodile.

Together and apart, their journey from a hot metal box to a stunning, savage climax is a brutal funhouse ride through the eerie landscape of late-twentieth-century Japan.

Follow Japan's two remaining "coin locker babies"--infants abandoned by their mothers in the public lockers of train stations--through an orphanage, an adoptive home on a nearly deserted island, and ultimately to Tokyo where they set off separately to find and destroy the women who abandoned them.

The third of this prolific Japanese author's 30 novels to appear in English, this is a cyber-Bildungsroman of playful breadth and uncertain depth. Two mothers abandon their infant boys in the Yokohama train station's coin lockers. The reader is not spared the mechanics of packaging a child in a parcel, nor the grim details of any of the other episodes of discomfort and suffering which follow in incremental doses, though always with such whimsy that the reader wonders whether or not to be offended. The heroes, Kiku and Hashi, grow up together; but, beyond their bizarre beginnings, they couldn't be more different. Kiku becomes a homicidal pole-vaulter whose inner rage gives him unusual speed and strength, but which also fosters an obsession with murder and a secret drug that sets any creature into a killing frenzy. The more delicate Hashi strives to find his mother, supporting himself as a prostitute in Toxittown-a chemical disaster zone insulated from Tokyo by a wall and armed guards-until one of his johns discovers his musical talent and makes him a star. The settings seem lifted from Japanese

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animation epics: an abandoned mining town, an underwater tunnel and a retreat in the mountains. At times, Murakami rambles, as in the case of a taxi driver's pointless monologue or the long interviews with women who might be Hashi's mother. Such digressions, however, are less the product of careless craft than of a lush and frantic imagination overwhelming its own project. Though expansive and exciting as its scope, the novel is as unfocused as its troubled heroes.

RYU MURAKAMI was born in 1952. The only son of schoolteacher parents, he grew up in the port city of Sasebo in southwestern Japan. After graduating from a local high school, where he played the drums in a band called Coelacanth, he went to an art college in Tokyo. It was while studying there that he entered his first novel, *Almost Transparent Blue*, in a competition for new writers. Published in 1976, the book won a major literary award and sold over a million copies. Since then, he has worked for a publishing house, presented a weekly music and interview radio program, and hosted a TV talk show. His literary output includes two collections of stories *Run, Takahashi* (1985) and *Topaz* (1988), and the novel *Coin Locker Babies* (1980), which made its debut in English early in 1995. His roman a clef 69 appeared in English in 1993. He has also directed four movies based on his writing, causing a sensation at an Italian film festival when *Tokyo Decadence* was shown there in 1992. His latest film is set in the U.S. and Cuba.

STEVEN SNYDER, the translator, is Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Among his first-rate translations from Japanese are Kunio Tsuji's *The Signore: Shogun of the Warring States*, which won the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize; Ryu Murakami's *Coin Locker Babies*; Kenzaburo Oe's *A Healing Family*; and the forthcoming *Out* by Natsuo Kirino.