

# The Beijing of Possibilities



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Review

Publishers Weekly

"Tel (Freud's Alphabet) spins a collection of dreamlike short stories out of the lives of Beijing's residents, from crime-fighting, gorilla-costumed messengers to thieves, buskers and composers.... The collection, part W.G. Sebald and part Italo Calvino, provides a glimpse for the Western reader into the complicated, vibrant world of Beijing."

Kirkus Reviews

A motley, charmingly odd collection of linked stories about contemporary China. Tel (Freud's Alphabet, 2003, etc.) offers an ingenious, often surreal account of the tensions between ancient tradition and go-go capitalism. He demonstrates an impressive range of tones, subjects and stratagems. In the opener, "Year of the Gorilla," an illegal resident of Beijing, wearing the suit in which he delivers Gorillagrams, thwarts a mugging and becomes a celebrity, for better and worse. "The Unofficial History of the Embroidered Couch" depicts a busy adman who seeks a traditional girl via a dating service and finds himself swapping messages and cell-phone photos with...a Ming Dynasty princess. The title of "Love! Duty! Humanity! Virtue!" riffs ironically on the American propaganda dropped from planes during the Korean War. Crippled as a soldier in that war, Uncle Ha dreams of making his fortune with a cotton-candy machine that he purchases from an army buddy in 1979, as the regime's rules against profit-making enterprise are loosening. But when Ha sends his nephew to town to pick up the machine, the naïve country boy encounters a terrifying vision of what engagement with the wider world might mean. In the long final story, "The Most Beautiful Woman in China," Tel constructs an imaginative superstructure for the whole book, and in so doing forces the Western reader into an uncomfortable moral accounting. Smart, subtly observed and entertaining.

## TimeOut Beijing

"Jonathan Tel skilfully avoids cliché with this collection of short stories about Beijing, instead choosing to examine the side of the city most foreigners rarely interact with, including an aspirational newly-married couple; a provincial teenager working as an ayi to pay her father's debts and a university graduate shooting up the corporate ranks due to his family's guanxi. Each vignette, regardless of tone, is imbued with a subtle, playful humour throughout, and also a sense of Chinese history and culture (Buddhist themes of fate can be found in a few stories)...Tel's stories are at their best when dealing with the trivial and comedic (like the Gorillagram turned national hero in 'Year of the Gorilla'). It's the seemingly mundane aspects of Beijing life, which he paints in a peculiar and flattering manner, that make this book such an enjoyable, insightful read."

## Product Description

Blending elements of the surreal with carefully observed details of life in present-day Beijing, Jonathan Tel's short stories offer a rich and highly entertaining guide to the city and its many and varied inhabitants—from a modern-day Monkey King to an equally contemporary indentured servant, from a boy tasting his first cotton candy to a Ming Dynasty princess posting her first online profile.

The stories offer a vicarious tour through modern Beijing and a long view of Chinese history. The reader flies through the book, chuckling over one character's trickery, moved by another's plight, and horrified at another's unwitting actions, until reaching the culminating novella, which brings the whole book and its take on China back to the Western reader with a stunning immediacy.

Americans' newly minted fascination with China, stoked by the 2008 Olympics, can find both intellectual and artistic satisfaction in this collection.

## 作者介绍:

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