

Book Review: *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales:  
Monster Comics from Edo Japan*

**J.T. Aris**

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*The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales: Monster Comics from Edo Japan*. Translated by Adam Kabat. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023.  
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**Author Bio:** J.T. Aris is a Danish immigrant, who now lives in Indianapolis, IN. Aris has found that the long incubation periods offered by life as a molecular biologist are perfect for thinking about stories. Sometimes they get written down on the backs of plate sealers. Aris's fiction has previously been featured in *The Fatal Flaw Magazine*, *Peculiar Magazine* and *Tint Journal*.

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*The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales: Monster Comics from Edo Japan* is a collection of kibyōshi, or monster comics, collected and translated by Adam Kabat. The book is filled with full pages of artwork and reproductions of kibyōshi with the original text still present. Translations and notes are included alongside including a generous number of footnotes that correspond to further information located in the back of the book. There are five main chapters, the first three dealing with multiple stories under the same theme (A Monster Catalogue, Monsters to the Rescue, and The Monster Takes a bride) while the last two offer deeper reading into two particular stories, *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel*, as named in the title of the book, and *The Demon Girl Comes to Edo*.

The introduction of the book itself is an engaging overview of the chapters to come as well as offering a few insightful sections on the intended social commentary of monsters, the eventual commercialization of monsters, and notes on the translations of each of the stories. “A Monster Catalogue” serves as a brief overview of various types of mythological monsters and brief snippets of the kibyoshi they inhabit. “Monsters to the Rescue” features works by Jippensha Ikku where in the monsters are the protagonists forever running in fear from the famed monster slayer Sakata no Kinpira as they attempt to go about their normal monster lives. “The Monster Takes a Bride” takes a deeper look into the topsy-turvy world of daily monster life, where ugliness is beauty and the lowly monsters attempt to embody the customs of the high-class humans. “The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel” tells the story of a farmer’s son with such beautiful buttocks that he attracts the attention of both a medieval lord and a much less desirable kappa set upon making away with the young man’s ‘stinky jewel’. Originally intended as

a souvenir or accompaniment to a traveling side show attraction, “The Demon Girl Comes to Edo” follows a young demon girl as she encounters everything from heroes to festivals as she travels through several notable locations. The notes section at the end of the book contains the enumeration of each footnote marked in the text. For this reason, the book is best enjoyed with an extra book mark tucked into the back to ensure nothing is missed.

*The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales* is an excellent and engaging introduction to the world of kibyōshi. Many of the topics touched upon in the book could easily serve as inspiration for future discussions, publications, or research projects regarding the comics themselves or the roles of monsters in Japanese art and culture, making this book perfect for scholars, researchers, and students looking into kibyōshi. Packed with commentary, and eye-catching, beautiful, and sometimes grotesque illustrations, *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales* would serve as an excellent point of reference or introduction for a reader interested in studying Japanese art, culture, or story-telling. Those reading for pleasure might find the first two sections of the book, which are more of an overview of various pieces of stories, a little disjointed, but the final two sections will fully satisfy the desire for a complete retelling of the tales. The earlier sections could serve as a great jumping off point for those searching for a particular type of story or monster to further explore in other sources, perhaps listed in this book’s extensive bibliography.

Overall, *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales* is filled with evocative art and intriguing insight into the stories it contains. It would be as at home on a coffee table, where its evocative art would be a terrific conversation piece, and as it

would be in a classroom or library, where it would stand as a fantastic reference to scholars wishing to study monster comics in greater depth.