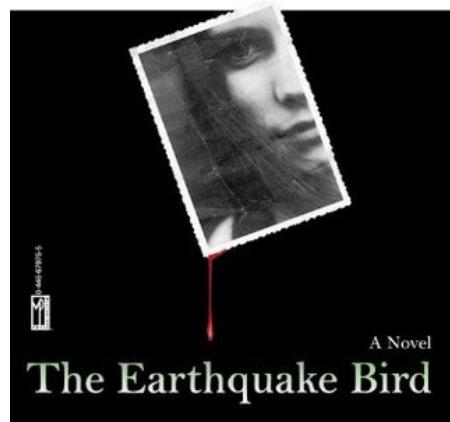


"Jones's narrative is spare, but spares nothing....Gripping and haunting—an unforgettable debut." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

# Susanna Jones



## The Earthquake Bird

*Susanna Jones*

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# The Earthquake Bird

Susanna Jones

**The Earthquake Bird** Susanna Jones

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Susanna Jones's exceptional debut is a thriller set in Tokyo, where 34-year-old Lucy Fly -- an English expat who translates "tedious" technical manuals -- has agreed to help a new arrival, Lily Bridges, navigate her first confusing weeks in Japan. Like Lucy, Lily has also fled an unhappy life in Yorkshire, but as Lily insinuates herself into Lucy's life, Lucy finds that she has gained a friend but lost her sometime lover, Teiji. "I had been in possession of a lover and a friend. Now

I had neither. They had stolen themselves from each other and me."

When Lily disappears and her body is found dismembered in Tokyo Bay, Lucy becomes the chief suspect and the focus of an intense police interrogation, through which she narrates her life story. From her unwelcome birth through her painful Yorkshire childhood, Lucy illuminates her growing fascination with music and language, both of which helped provide her means of escape.

But Lucy now must struggle to prove her innocence in the murder of Lily. Alas, the first person she must convince is herself. "The defendant must decide how to plead. And here is my plea. Not guilty, but not not guilty.... I, of all people, should not be too hasty to judge." As she probes ever deeper into the enigmatic mind of Lucy Fly, Susanna Jones creates a brilliantly rendered drama of psychological suspense in which the ghostly vestiges of guilt, the thin line between love and obsession, and the seeming clarity of language combine to cloud the judgment of both character and reader alike. (*Fall 2001 Selection*)

## The Earthquake Bird Details

Date : Published March 1st 2003 by Mysterious Press (first published January 1st 2001)

ISBN : 9780446679756

Author : Susanna Jones

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Japan, Mystery, Crime, Contemporary, Thriller, Literary Fiction, Mystery Thriller

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## From Reader Review The Earthquake Bird for online ebook

### Rachael says

3.5\*

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### Steve says

What an intriguing crime story - nothing like any crime I've read before. The crime is very much secondary to the character telling us of the events. The story starts off with Lucy being arrested and, while she is being interrogated, she tells of her life and events leading up to the crime. Some readers will hate the ending - I loved it - and I won't say more about it than that. Hard to believe this was the author's first novel. Not only that, she won an award for it. Beautifully written and the way she writes about Tokyo makes me want to go there and visit! Heartrending and deeply emotional, I couldn't wait to see how it turned out - and wish there was more now it's over!

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### Emma says

Absolutely brilliant

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### Val says

This is a character study not a mystery and, as a character study of a lonely woman, it is well done. Lucy does not let many people get close to her and is reluctant to get close to others, so it is not surprising that she is lonely. She did

have a rotten childhood, completely starved of affection and feeling guilty about her brother's death. However, she has run all the way to Japan to escape that, so it is sad that she keep pushing away anyone who tries to get close, and obsessing about someone who doesn't want to be close. She managed to push me away too. I didn't really care about her.

I found the book technically accomplished and emotionally sterile.

The average group rating was 3.9

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### Tim The Enchanter says

#### More Confused than Clever - 2 Stars

This was a book of confusion. It was filled with confused characters, it seemed confused as to what genre it wanted to be and I am confused as to why the terrible books are written by the CWA award winners for best

new authors.

## **Plot Summary**

Lucy is British. Lucy escaped her life by going to Japan. Lucy is morose. Lucy is obsessive. Lucy has friends and Lucy loses friends. Maybe Lucy killed her friends.

## **My Take**

I thought this book was a hot mess. For the most part, it was book of confusion but lets start with the positive.

Despite my obvious dislike, the author is not a bad writer. Her style is not amateurish. She appeared to have a plan with this novel and she stuck with it. Unfortunately, I liked very little of it. Although I wasn't enjoying the majority of the novel, the fact the writing itself was good and the fact book was relatively short, kept me from putting it down and giving it one star.

Just having quality writing skills does not translate into a great novel. For the most part, this was a character novel. A bad character novel. Lucy was the major character with two secondary characters. Not were well developed and but worst of all, each lacked insight into their own actions and emotions. Lucy was morose and broken. Generally, I would not take issue with that but Lucy had no sense of who she was and failed to develop one through the novel. She failed to grow and learn from her experiences. It left me feeling that the events were a waste of my time.

The story contains a mystery. Instead of being explored it is simply revealed. As we near the end of the story, the author tells us that we have been in the middle of a second mystery the whole time. Given the character's lack of insight, its no wonder it took the characters by surprise. A reader who does not lack insight saw it coming a mile away.

## **Final Thoughts**

There was not much to enjoy here. The lack of insight displayed was disappointing. A bit of insight goes a long way. If you like your characters dull and uninspired. This is the book for you.

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## **Deanne says**

Mesmerising, a book that captures at the start with a mystery, the fact that it's set in Tokyo but centers around two English women, one newly arrived. The police investigation is not really covered, instead the reader is presented with Lucy's version of events. As you get deeper into the story you begin to wonder what the truth is and how it will all end.

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## **Toby says**

Is there anyone else I can mention beyond Highsmith when comparing literary noirish tales of unhinged characters in a domestic setting? That is how it felt throughout but, one of her lesser works perhaps?

Earthquake Bird is another one of the books recently saved from being donated to a book sale without ever having been read. This period cleansing has forced me to finally read some really very good books over the years and yet this isn't one of them. Serviceable, generally entertaining, an easy read that still forces the reader to ask questions about the events and the narrator - the switching between first and third person mid sentence was a particularly interesting element to Susanna Jones's protagonist - but never entirely engaging, and certainly not what I would call very good. Of most interest is the portrait of Tokyo from the perspective of a foreigner who isn't just a tourist but who, even after immersing herself in the city and its culture and way of life for seven years, still sees the place with foreign eyes. This at least marks it as a somewhat unique experience for a western reader of fiction.

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### **Alan says**

another unreliable narrator from Yorkshire (after just finishing God's Own Country)... An economic, taut murder mystery set in Tokyo though, so nothing like GOC. I don't want to say too much about it because least known the better but you know it's going to be unusual when the suspect starts referring to herself in the third person. *Lucy was even less attractive as a teenager than she is now.* And states that as a student she lived on sperm and alcohol. A high intake of both.

An absorbing, thrilling read, and unusual.

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### **Mobyskine says**

The starting chapter was okay and quite mysterious making me curious much. Story was simple, it narrates throughout Lucy's memories and flashbacks. Lovely and yet engrossing. I love the flashback of Teiji on how Lucy met him and falling in love. Then Lily came and every hidden feelings and secrets, back and forth in between Lucy's past and current been told. The narration was okay although I was a bit confused in between as 'Lucy' and 'T' from the paragraph.

Point of the story was actually vague to me-- in term of what had really happened to both Teiji and Lily especially. This probably more of Lucy trying to find her inner self, her own feelings, discovering own identity and such. The tension created from both Lily and Teiji was somewhat emotional like I dearly understand Lucy's feeling but at the same time I was a bit wondering what truly will happen to Lucy.

I really enjoyed the read-- the atmospheric of Japan been told well. Night view and lovely eating shops and cafes. Refreshing and different.

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### **Jo says**

Lucy is a translator living and working in Japan. The police question her about another missing woman who has since been found murdered and this prompts Lucy to recount her life story. I liked the contrasting cultures that made up this story and there was a underlying current as to whether Lucy was as innocent as she makes out. What I found weird was that there were times when Lucy was telling her story and referring to herself in the third person.

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## Blair says

Lucy Fly is a translator who has lived and worked in Japan for ten years. The story opens as she is taken into questioning by police about the murder of her missing 'friend', Lily - although it soon becomes apparent that Lily wasn't quite as much of a friend as she may have appeared. Lucy's narrative looks back on her life in Japan: how she came to be there, the development and, in some cases, demise of number of friendships including her acquaintance with Lily, and her relationship with her lover Teiji. *The Earthquake Bird* is ostensibly a mystery/thriller focused on the question of whether Lucy killed Lily, but to my mind it is much more of a character study exploring the complicated psyche and motivations of Lucy.

I didn't really like Lucy at first, despite feeling that I had certain traits in common with her (which would normally make me like a character, even if they're meant to be horrendous). However, the further the story progressed, the more I began to warm to and sympathise with her, even as I continued to find her behaviour and decisions strange - for example, (view spoiler). She has something of the classic unreliable narrator about her, and relates her story in a clear, almost sparse narrative style, which fits the setting perfectly and is incredibly effective at evoking both the romance and the loneliness of her life in Japan.

Lucy has an irritating habit of occasionally referring to herself in the third person, and I was disappointed that this was a bit of a red herring - I wondered for much of the book whether (view spoiler), but it seemed not. I also found it distracting that the names Lucy and Lily looked so similar on the page, but I expect this was deliberate, as Lily often seemed to typify the things that Lucy hated about herself: there were times when I wondered if Lily had even existed, or at least whether Lucy was projecting her own negative traits onto her. Lily's contrasting attributes didn't seem to add up to a believable person, but I did feel this was a deliberate decision by the author, and said more about the untrustworthy nature of Lucy's account than it did about Lily. As with many stories of this nature, the actual details of the peripheral characters were, in the end, almost irrelevant.

I chanced upon *The Earthquake Bird* in the library when I was actually looking for the author's most recent novel, *When Nights Were Cold*. This is why I will always love going to the library, even though I own a Kindle: I'd probably never have heard of this book if I hadn't stumbled across it, and I'm so glad I did, because it proved to be one of my best discoveries of recent months. It's quite a short book but there are so many layers, so many things to examine and decipher - and I adored the surreal ending. I would definitely recommend this one and I'm very much looking forward to reading more by Susanna Jones.

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## Lissibith says

What an incredible book. I got it from a yard sale - not bought there, but it was left over after the sale and was just given to me - and I just put it away for years thinking that no book obtained in such a manner could possibly be worth very much.

Boy was I wrong.

I found the book to be gripping and deeply atmospheric, really getting into the head of its main character without presuming to explain everything. Sometimes Lucy doesn't make sense. Sometimes she contradicts

herself. Her feelings and motivations are complicated, and her relationships tenuous and built on specific interactions.

The mystery of who killed Lily, a British woman who was living and working in Tokyo - is central to the book, but it is not the POINT of the book, nor is the revelation of the guilty party the climax. This is, instead, the story of a woman trying to understand herself and her life. I compared it in one of my updates to *We Have Always Lived at the Castle*, and having finished it I think the comparison is even more apt. It's a story about its characters, not about its plot.

I recommend it to anyone who likes that sort of story - the imprecision, the unanswered questions and the unreliability of the narrator. It's a quick and engrossing read.

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### **Rita Aoun says**

I would give this book 2.5 stars if I could. It wasn't more than okay, but it had some interesting bits.

First, I felt the title was forced on the book. The writer mentioned the possibility of a bird that might be singing during earthquakes - and who may not even exist - like twice throughout the whole book. I didn't feel it was relevant, unless it's a sign that the narrator was mad, in which case it was unnecessary. Lucy had bigger issues than possibly hearing a nonexistent bird.

Speaking of Lucy, I absolutely hated that Jones made her keep switching between the first and the third person during her narration. There was no pattern for the choices, it was simply annoying.

That being said, the story *was* interesting. Not much happens in real time (the book is mostly made up of flashbacks) but Lucy's point of view is interesting. I liked her perception of everything: she kept putting everything (people, cities, countries, etc.) in boxes of clichés so she either loved them or hated them. I liked her insecurities (kudos for Jones for not making me roll my eyes at those) and I enjoyed her mild obsessiveness.

The ending was weird for me, I would have preferred a different one.

All in all, this is a different kind of story, and it's quite short. It will keep you interested, albeit not completely engaged. It was probably meant to be this way.

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### **Joodith says**

What a strange story this is: British ex-pat Lucy Fly has lived in Tokyo for ten years and works as a translator; she befriends Lily, another Brit newly arrived in Tokyo. Her lover – she hesitates to use the word “boyfriend” is Teiji, an amateur photographer, about whom Lucy is quite possessive.

The book opens with Lucy being questioned, and not for the first time, about the murder of Lily; as Lucy was the last known person to see her alive she becomes the main suspect. Why, then, is she so reticent about helping herself out of the situation? Why doesn't she tell the police that she is fluent in Japanese? I actually

found that the notion of the police not knowing this to be quite ridiculous given that they know where she works, and actually sought her out at her workplace.

None of the characters is fully developed; Lucy herself is selfish and unsympathetic and does not endear herself to this reader. Described on the back cover as “a young, vulnerable English girl” - hardly, considering she left her native Yorkshire some ten years previously, and has survived in Tokyo ever since. She is self-sufficient, self-serving and almost makes a point of being unfriendly and unsociable. Vulnerable? I don't think so. She decided on Tokyo because it was as far away from Yorkshire as she could possibly go without getting nearer to it again. She befriended Lily because another ex-pat asked her to, but she took an instant dislike to Lily because she was from Yorkshire. What is it about that county that Ms Jones dislikes so much? We learn little about Lucy even when she reveals something of her early family life, when she shows an incredible sense of survival. Having lived in Tokyo for ten years it's amazing, even given her strange personality, that she has only one friend, Natsuko a work colleague. Lucy also has the extraordinarily irritating habit of referring to herself in the third person. Why? I'm darned if I know. Why is the book called *The Earthquake Bird*? Again – I'm darned if I know as it seems a fanciful title which bears very little connection to the story. The descriptive writing of Japan is well done and enjoyable, and that is what kept me going with this short book, and I have to wonder, if this book was set in Yorkshire, say, would it have been even half the book it is?

The ending is a bit of a flop as it fizzles slowly out of what little steam there was. All in all a disappointing book; I honestly wouldn't recommend it if you're looking for a thriller.

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### **Anjana Avinash says**

*The Earthquake Bird* is the debut novel by Susanna Jones. The stage is set right in the first page where we find Lucy Fly being questioned in a Tokyo police station about the murder of a friend Lily Bridges. Lucy, who is fluent in Japanese, is a translator and very good at her job. She has very little contact with other expatriates. Lucy lives in a bubble of her own allowing only a select few to breach that wall, Teiji being one of them. He is a brilliant photographer who works in his uncle's noodle shop. Lucy is enthralled by Teiji whom she finds to be a kindred soul, and this relationship acts as the catalyst that sets off the main events in the book. Lily Bridges is also from Yorkshire but unlike Lucy she is completely at sea in a foreign country. She is not able to settle down in any way and her inability to function well compels Lucy to step in and help her, albeit hesitantly.

*The Earthquake Bird* cannot be classified as a thriller even though the story starts with a murder. The murder that's committed is merely a thread to hang the story on. The author has ventured into the mind of young Lucy Fly, an expatriate in Japan. It's the story of a lonely yet strong girl who is trying to make some sense of the highly skewed deck of cards life has dealt her.

Lucy has always been an outsider, even in her own home. Being the youngest and sole female in a completely male-dominated household in East Yorkshire, and a highly intelligent person to boot, Lucy had been the victim of vicious bullying by her siblings. Being away in University had helped her escape the callousness, but it's only in Japan that she actually feels comfortable. The label of an expatriate seems to give her the freedom to revel in her separateness. The natural reticence of the Japanese is exactly what Lucy requires to live the solitary life she enjoys.

Lucy leads a simple life and is content to be an observer of the world around her. The author is able to show

us the vulnerability that hides within Lucy. She sees only imperfections within herself but we get a glimpse of the strength and passion hidden beneath. Unknowingly, Lucy is constantly searching for acceptance, for someone to call her own. She finds reflections of herself in Teiji who is also a loner.

Susanna Jones won the prestigious John Llewellyn Rhys prize for this debut novel as well as the Betty Trask Award. The author's style is not elaborate or flowery, but it is haunting in its conciseness. Her words are spare but they manage to convey an intensity that is moving. The fact that the narrative moves between a first person and a third person perspective raises doubts in the reader's mind regarding Lucy's mental stability. But I think that it's Lucy's attempt to distance herself from the pain she had to endure. It's her defense mechanism to deal with the neglect and cruelty that was meted out to her as a child and even later. The focus is not on the crime which was committed but it's an attempt to make sense of what went wrong in Lucy's carefully controlled life just at the time when she was letting down her guard and settling down. There's a slight ambiguity to the conclusion, which might prove disappointing to some readers, but I liked the possibility hidden there.

I leave you with Susanna's words on Tokyo – "Tokyo was more than Lucy could have hoped for. Too big ever to be found there, too noisy to have to listen to anything, too expensive to worry about saving any money. And under the chaos, a cool and quietly beating heart. An organ that pumped blood through stooping centenarians, three-year-old Nintendo whizz kids, office workers with no time for meals or sleep, and university students with all the time in the world."

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