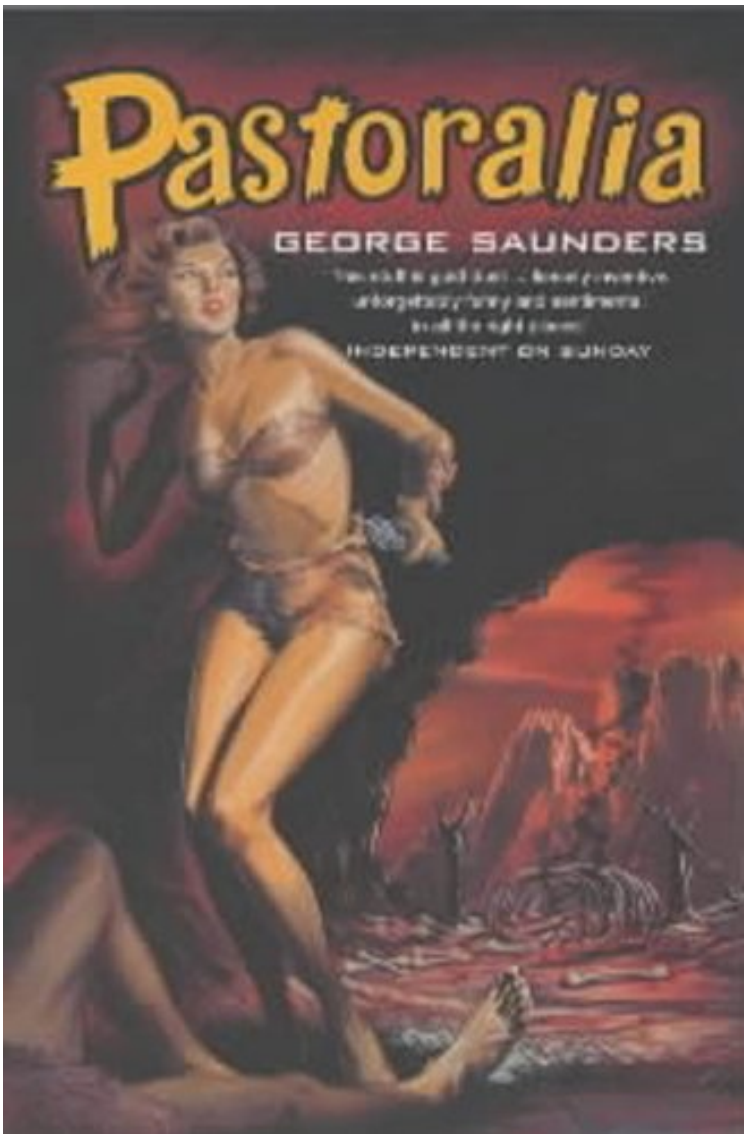


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Pastoralia



Par George Saunders
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(Library ebook) Pastoralia

Par George Saunders : Pastoralia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pastoralia:

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Description : Description du produitHailed by Thomas Pynchon as "graceful, dark, authentic, and funny," George Saunders now surpasses his New York Times Notable Book, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, with this bestselling collection of stories set against a warped, hilarious, and terrifyingly recognizable American landscape.

Prsentation de l'diteur'Saunders is an astoundingly tuned voice - graceful, dark, authentic and funny - telling just the kind of stories we need to get us through these times' Thomas PynchonIn PASTORALIA elements of contemporary life are twisted, merged and amplified into a slightly skewed version of modern America. A couple live and work in a caveman theme-park, where speaking is an instantly punishable offence. A born loser attends a self-help seminar where he is encouraged to rid himself of all the people who are 'crapping in your oatmeal'. And a male exotic dancer and his family are terrorised by their decomposing aunt who visits

them with a solemn message from beyond the grave. With an uncanny combination of deadpan naturalism and uproarious humour, George Saunders creates a world that is both indelibly original and yet hauntingly familiarcom

In both his acclaimed debut, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, and his second collection, *Pastoralia*, George Saunders imagines a near future where capitalism has run amok. Consumption and the service economy rule the earth. The Haves are grotesque beings, mutilated by their crass desires and impossible wealth. The Have Nots are no less crippled, both emotionally and physically, by their inferior status. It's a kind of Westworld scenario, but instead of robots, the serving wenches, bellboys, and extras are real people, all of them mercilessly indentured by the free market. Sounds like bleak stuff, doesn't it? Yet Saunders handles his characters with grace and humor. In the title story, for example, a couple occupies a squalid corner of a human zoo, where they act out a parody of caveman times, communicating in grunts and hand motions (speaking is instantly punishable by the Orwellian management) and conducting their lives during 15-minute smoke breaks. In "Winky," a born loser (really, all of Saunders's characters are born losers) visits a self-help seminar, where he's encouraged to rid himself of all those people who are "crapping in your oatmeal." Exhilarated at the prospect of dumping his simple, crazy-haired, religion-besotted sister, he returns home to the bleak discovery that he needs her as much as she needs him. The protagonist of "Sea Oak" works as a stripper in an aviation-themed restaurant and lives next to a crack house with his unemployed sisters, their babies, and a sweet old maid of an aunt. The aunt dies, and then returns from the grave--not so sweet, now, and still decomposing--with strange powers and a sobering message: You ever been in the grave? It sucks so bad! You regret all the things you never did. You little bitches are going to have a very bad time in the grave unless you get on the stick, believe me! The characters and situations in the rest of *Pastoralia* are equally wretched. But Saunders rescues them from utter despair with a loving belief in the triumph of the human spirit: yes, things can always get worse, but worse is better than the cold dirt of the grave. And in the small space between wretchedness and death there is plenty of room for laughter, and even love.

--Tod Nelson

Extrait 1. I have to admit Im not feeling my best. Not that Im doing so bad. Not that I really have anything to complain about. Not that I would actually verbally complain if I did have something to complain about. No. Because Im Thinking Positive/Saying Positive. Im sitting back on my haunches, waiting for people to poke in their heads. Although its been thirteen days since anyone poked in their head and Janets speaking English to me more and more, which is partly why I feel so, you know, crummy. Jeez, she says first thing this morning. Im so tired of roast goat I could scream. What am I supposed to say to that?

It puts me in a bad spot. She thinks Im a goody-goody and that her speaking English makes me uncomfortable. And shes right. It does. Because weve got it good. Every morning, a new goat, just killed, sits in our Big Slot. In our Little Slot, a book of matches. Thats better than some. Some are required to catch wild hares in snares. Some are required to wear pioneer garb while cutting the heads off chickens. But not us. I just have to haul the dead goat out of the Big Slot and skin it with a sharp flint. Janet just has to make the fire. So things are pretty good. Not as good as in the old days, but then again, not so bad. In the old days, when heads were constantly poking in, we liked what we did. Really hammed it up. Had little grunting fights. Whenever I was about to toss a handful of dirt in her face Id pound a rock against a rock in rage. That way she knew to close her eyes. Sometimes she did this kind of crude weaving. It was like: Roots of Weaving. Some-times wed go down to Russian Peasant Farm for a barbecue, I remember there was Murray and Leon, Leon was dating Eileen, Eileen was the one with all the cats, but now, with the big decline in heads poking in, the Russian Peasants are all elsewhere, some to Administration but most not, Eileens cats have gone wild, and honest to God sometimes I worry Ill go to the Big Slot and find it goatless. 2. This morning I go to the Big Slot and find it goatless. Instead of a goat theres a note: Hold on, hold on, it says. The goats coming, for crissake. Dont get all snooty. The problem is, what am I supposed to do during the time when Im supposed to be skinning the goat with the flint? I decide to pretend to be desperately ill. I rock in a corner and moan. This gets old. Skinning the goat with the flint takes the better part of an hour. No way am I rocking and moaning for an hour. Janet comes in from her Separate Area and her eyebrows go up. No freaking goat? she says. I make some guttural sounds and some motions meaning: Big rain come down, and boom, make goats run, goats now away, away in high hills, and as my fear was great, I did not follow. Janet scratches under her armpit and makes a sound like a monkey, then lights a cigarette. What a bunch of shit, she says. Why you insist, Ill never know. Whos here? Do you see anyone here but us? I gesture to her to put out the cigarette and make the fire. She gestures to me to kiss her butt. Why am I making a fire? she says. A fire in advance of a goat. Is this like a wishful fire? Like a hopeful fire? No, sorry, Ive had it. What would I do in the real world if there was thunder and so on and our goats actually ran away? Maybe Id mourn, like

cut myself with that flint, or maybe I'd kick your ass for being so stupid as to leave the goats out in the rain.

What, they didn't put it in the Big Slot? I scowl at her and shake my head. Well, did you at least check the Little Slot? she says. Maybe it was a small goat and they really crammed it in. Maybe for once they gave us a nice quail or something. I give her a look, then walk off in a rolling gait to check the Little Slot. Nothing. Well, freak this, she says. I'm going to walk right out of here and see what the hell is up. But she won't. She knows it and I know it. She sits on her log and smokes and together we wait to hear a clunk in the Big Slot. About lunch we hit the Reserve Crackers. About dinner we again hit the Reserve Crackers. No heads poke in and there's no clunk in either the Big or Little Slot. Then the quality of light changes and she stands at the door of her Separate Area. No goat tomorrow, I'm out of here and down the hill, she says. I swear to God.

You watch. I go into my Separate Area and put on my footies. I have some cocoa and take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form. Do I note any attitudinal difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner overall? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not. I fax it in. 3. Next morning, no goat. Also no note. Janet sits on her log and smokes and together we wait to hear a clunk in the Big Slot. No heads poke in and there's no clunk in either the Big or Little Slot. About lunch we hit the Reserve Crackers. About dinner we again hit the Reserve Crackers. Then the quality of light changes and she stands at the door of her Separate Area. Crackers, crackers, crackers! she says pitifully. Jesus, I wish you'd talk to me. I don't see why you won't. I'm about to go bonkers. We could at least talk. At least have some fun. Maybe play some Scrabble. Scrabble. I wave good night and give her a grunt. Bastard, she says, and hits me with the flint. She's a good thrower and I almost say ow. Instead I make a horselike sound of fury and consider pinning her to the floor in an effort to make her submit to my superior power etc. etc. Then I go into my Separate Area. I put on my footies and tidy up. I have some cocoa. I take out a Daily Partner

Performance Evaluation Form. Do I note any attitudinal difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner overall? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not. I fax it in. 4. In the morning in the Big Slot there's a nice fat goat. Also a note: Ha ha! it says. Sorry about the no goat and all. A little mix-up. In the future, when you look in here for a goat, what you will find on every occasion is a goat, and not a note. Or maybe both. Ha ha! Happy eating! Everything's fine! I skin the goat briskly with the flint.

Janet comes in, smiles when she sees the goat, and makes, very quickly, a nice little fire, and does not say one English word all morning and even traces a few of our pictographs with a wetted finger, as if awestruck at their splendid beauty and so on. Around noon she comes over and looks at the cut on my arm, from where she threw the flint. You gonna live? she says. Sorry, man, really sorry, I just like lost it. I give her a look. She cans the English, then starts wailing in grief and sort of hunkers down in apology. The goat tastes super after two days of crackers. I have a nap by the fire and for once she doesn't walk around singing pop hits in English, only mumbles unintelligibly and pretends to be catching and eating small bugs. Her way of saying sorry. No one pokes their head in. 5. Once, back in the days when people still poked their heads in, this guy poked his head in. Whoa, he said. These are some very cramped living quarters. This really makes you appreciate the way we live now. Do you have call-waiting? Do you know how to make a nice mushroom cream sauce? Ha ha! I pity you guys. And also, and yet, I thank you guys, who were my precursors, right? Is that the spirit? Is that your point? You weren't ignorant on purpose? You were doing the best you could? Just like I am? Probably someday some guy representing me will be in there, and some punk who I'm precursor of will be hooting at me, asking why my shoes were made out of dead cows and so forth? Because in that future time, wearing dead skin on your feet, no, they won't do that. That will seem to them like barbarity, just like you dragging that broad around by her hair seems to us like barbarity, although to me, not that much, after living with my wife fifteen years. Ha ha! Have a good one! I never drag Janet around by the hair. Too

click. Just then his wife poked in her head. Stinks in there, she said, and yanked her head out. That's the roasting goat, her husband said. Everything wasn't all prettied up. When you ate meat, it was like you were eating actual meat, the flesh of a dead animal, an animal that maybe had been licking your hand just a few hours before. I would never do that, said the wife. You do it now, bozo! said the man. You just pay someone to do the dirty work. The slaughtering? The skinning? I do not either, said the wife. We couldn't see them, only hear them through the place where the heads poke in. Ever heard of a slaughterhouse? the husband said. Ha ha! Gotcha! What do you think goes on in there? Some guy you never met kills and flays a cow with what you might term big old cow eyes, so you can have your shoes and I can have my steak and my shoes! That's different, she said. Those animals were raised for slaughter. That's what they were made for.

Plus I cook them in an oven, I don't squat there in my underwear with smelly smoke blowing all over me. Thank heaven for small favors, he said. Joking! I'm joking. You squatting in your underwear is not such a

bad mental picture, believe me.Plus where do they poop, she said.Ask them, said the husband. Ask them where they poop, if you so choose. You paid your dime. That is certainly your prerogative.I dont believe I will, said the wife.Well, Im not shy, he said.Then there was no sound from the head-hole for quite some time. Possibly they were quietly discussing it.Okay, so where do you poop? asked the husband, poking his head in.We have disposable bags that mount on a sort of rack, said Janet. The septic doesnt come up this far.Ah, he said. They poop in bags that mount on racks.Wonderful, said his wife. Im the richer for that information.But hold on, the husband said. In the old times, like when the cave was real and all, where then did they go? I take it there were no disposal bags in those times, if Im right.In those times they just went out in the woods, said Janet.Ah, he said. That makes sense.You see what I mean about Janet? When addressed directly were supposed to cower shrieking in the corner but instead she answers twice in English?I gave her a look.Oh, hes okay, she whispered. Hes no narc. I can tell.In a minute in came a paper airplane: our Client Vignette Evaluation.Under Overall Impression hed written: A-okay! Very nice.Under Learning Value hed written: We learned where they pooped. Both old days and now.I added it to our pile, then went into my Separate Area and put on my footies. I filled out my Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form. Did I note any attitudinal difficulties? I did not. How did I rate my Partner overall? Very good. Were there any Situations which required Mediation?There were not.I faxed it in. Reprinted from Pastoralia by George Saunders by permission of Riverhead, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc. Copyright 2001, George Saunders. All rights reserved. This excerpt, or any parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission.