



Evil and the Mask

Fuminori Nakamura , Satoko Izumo (Translator) , Stephen Coates (Translator)

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The second book by prize-winning Japanese novelist Fuminori Nakamura to be available in English translation, a follow-up to 2012's critically acclaimed *The Thief*?another fantastically creepy, electric literary thriller that explores the limits of human depravity?and the powerful human instinct to resist evil.

When Fumihiro Kuki is eleven years old, his elderly, enigmatic father calls him into his study for a meeting. "I created you to be a cancer on the world," his father tells him. It is a tradition in their wealthy family: a patriarch, when reaching the end of his life, will beget one last child to cause misery in a world that cannot be controlled or saved. From this point on, Fumihiro will be specially educated to learn to create as much destruction and unhappiness in the world around him as a single person can. Between his education in hedonism and his family's resources, Fumihiro's life is one without repercussions. Every door is open to him, for he need obey no laws and may live out any fantasy he might have, no matter how many people are hurt in the process. But as his education progresses, Fumihiro begins to question his father's mandate, and starts to resist.

Evil and the Mask Details

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Author : Fuminori Nakamura , Satoko Izumo (Translator) , Stephen Coates (Translator)

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From Reader Review Evil and the Mask for online ebook

Gregor Xane says

When I read this from the product description, I figured I pretty much had to read the book:

When Fumihiro Kuki is eleven years old, his elderly, enigmatic father calls him into his study for a meeting. "I created you to be a cancer on the world," his father tells him. It is a tradition in their wealthy family: a patriarch, when reaching the end of his life, will beget one last child to dedicate to causing misery in a world that cannot be controlled or saved. From this point on, Fumihiro will be specially educated to learn to create as much destruction and unhappiness in the world around him as a single person can.

Does Nakamura write a novel equal to this premise? Well, he comes pretty darn close. The first chapter of this book is dynamite, a textbook example of how to hook a reader. This book is relentlessly grim throughout, but it doesn't finish on the note I'd been anticipating. Some of the dialog is a bit overdone, especially when the characters are waxing philosophical. But that shouldn't deter the reader who doesn't mind reading noir where almost every character is a sociopath.

Note on the Kindle Edition: I read this in Kindle format, and I must offer here some praise to the publisher, Soho Crime. The eBook formatting on this novel was top-notch. It nearly recreates the admiration one feels for a finely crafted interior design for a physical book.

Elizabeth says

I set this book down about a third of the way through for previously-unencountered reasons. The flow of events was somewhat intriguing, and the main character was unique, but I couldn't get over the questions the translations raised. Many sentences were clumsy and cliched, while others had a subtle dark artistry. I found myself distracted wondering which was the true voice and which were mistakes of translation. The writing style didn't add up to a whole that I could continue reading. I really do wish I could read this book in its original form, because I do think that the author's voice and style could be beautiful.

Eli says

This is a dark story, but it's full of themes that everyone can appreciate on some level. Not feeling like you belong, haunted by your past and your secrets, feeling as though someone's life has been completely ruined just because you exist. The journey that Fumihiro takes is a desperate one, and Nakamura shows you this path by flipping back and forth between the past and present. Using short, suspenseful chapters, he keeps you on the edge of your seat, wondering what will happen to these characters. You can't help but put yourself in their shoes, wondering what you would do in their situation. Nakamura blurs the line between light and dark, good and evil. He illustrates that nothing in life is completely black and white. We all live in various shades of gray.

MadameMelli says

Ich muss meine Gedanken zu diesem Buch noch etwas ordnen, aber es hat mir definitiv gefallen.

Vom Klappentext her habe ich etwas vollkommen anderes erwartet, dennoch konnte mich die teilweise schon philosophische Handlung überzeugen.

Moriartyandherbooks says

A unique novel! The main character doesn't become the typical killer caricature that often happens when this concept of "nature vs. nurture" in the "how do people become evil" debate. This, and the unexpected direction the tale takes, highly impressed me.

My book is filled with so many tabs because there were so many amazing lines and discussion on the nature of human beings and their ability to balance and weigh the actions of evil, both from others and themselves.

Schurkenblog says

Bösartig, düster, hoffnungslos! Lesetipp!

Tradition wird in Japan groß geschrieben. Ganz besonders dann, wenn man zum Kuki-Clan gehört. Fumihiro ist gefangen, denn sein Vater hat etwas ganz Besonderes mit dem Jungen vor. Er will der Welt ein Geschwür des Bösen geben. Dieses Geschwür hat einen Namen: Fumihiro.

Der Clanpatriarch verspricht den Jungen, dass er zum vierzehnten Geburtstag die Hölle kennen lernen wird. Dass bei diesem Plan seine Adoptivschwester Kaori eine große Rolle spielen ahnt er noch nicht. Grausam setzt der Patriarch seine Familientradition fort. Dann rückt der Geburtstag näher und so nach und nach tut sich das Grauen des Bösen auf.

Fuminori Nakamura ist wohl auch so ein Japaner mit zwei Gesichtern. Sein erstes übersetztes Buch „Der Dieb“ liest sich nämlich ganz anders, das ist so eine Geschichte, die den Schalk im Nacken hat. In „Die Maske“ geht es auch um die Unterwelt Tokios, aber viel bösartiger, dunkler, hoffnungsloser.

Beim Lesen war ich von der ersten Seite an gefesselt und tastete mich mit Beklemmungsgefühlen voran. Denn dieser alte böse Mann, Fumihiros Vater, lässt dem Jungen keine Chance. Und man ahnt: Das kann nur böse enden und überhaupt, diesen Traditionen entkommt man nicht. So ergeht es auch Fumihiro, der eigentlich ein guter Junge ist, dem aber keine Chance bleibt, sein Leben im Guten zu führen. In so einer Familie ist einfach kein Platz für Gutes, und genau das beweist Nakamura auf jeder Seite. Gut ist es nur für den Leser: Denn der verfolgt das fortschreitende Grauen und weiß: Das wird böse enden.

Wieder einmal hat mich Fuminori Nakamura fesseln können. Und zwar von Anfang an. Denn auch sein zweites, sein richtig böses, Gesicht steht dem japanischen Autor richtig gut. Wer sich auf eine hoffnungslose Familientradition einlassen möchte, kommt um dieses Buch nicht rum. Bei all dem Bösen ist es nämlich verdammt gut zu lesen. Lesetipp!

Bonnie says

This review was originally published to Bookish Ardour.

Evil and the Mask turned out to be one of those stories I was far from expecting. I was expecting a suspenseful atmosphere with in-depth, unsettling thrills to make you question humanity and the darkness inside us. Instead I was presented with idealistic theories of humanity's deep-seated insecurities, laziness derived obedience, and selective ignorance.

I warmed up to the characters quite quickly and the idea of a family's insane custom; to create a child to be a cancer in the world. When you first begin the story, it's difficult not be swept away by the creepiness of Fumihiro's father calling his son into his study and revealing the reason his son exists. The atmosphere is fantastic in that scene and I couldn't help questioning the sheer audacity Fumihiro's father had when it came to believing he could procreate expressly to cause havoc in the world.

What type of sick and twisted individual could believe such a thing? It's arrogant, it's conceited, and extremely narcissistic. The idea, the questions it creates, sets up the atmosphere and your expectations for the rest of the story.

I thoroughly enjoyed the beginning and reading about Fumihiro's early life, as well as the foundations for how he will turn out as a character. I found myself wanting nothing bad to happen to either Fumihiro his adopted sister.

The story took a turn I wasn't expecting. I don't believe the protagonist ever really had to struggle with his inner darkness in the way the synopsis portrays, but there is definitely a struggle present. With the turn in the story it only amplifies the process we all go through of trying to understand ourselves.

Unfortunately I felt Evil and the Mask began to drag after the halfway mark. Each dialogue exchange began to sound like every other one and none of the characters gave an impression of differentiation when they spoke. You were able to look into Fumihiro's head and read his ideas. These ideas and thoughts were echoed in dialogue and then again when another character shared their thoughts with Fumihiro.

By the end of Evil and the Mask I felt I was reading a platform for the author to share their speculations rather than creating questions via character and story. It's a shame really. I was thoroughly looking forward to reading something to question morals, ethics, and human depravity. Unfortunately I'm not quite sure what the story ended up questioning and I don't feel Fumihiro grew as a character.

Evil and the Mask is one of those stories where you're not reading for the action, the emotion, or the pull, but more for ideas on human self-conditioning, self awareness, and finally self acceptance.

Rand says

The ideas—concerning the efficacy of chaos vs the Problem of Evil as an axiomatic choice on the level of the individual, family, corporation, and to a lesser extent, the state—contained in this book would perhaps have been more successful intellectually as a series of essays than a novel.

As a novel, it reads rather quickly. There are occasional lines of near-insight ("Happiness is a fortress") which tempt one to reach for pad and pen to make note of, but the suspense was thicker and quicker than the distance between me and my writing implements. There's a line in here somewhere about "shallow books" doing a disservice to their readers by imparting their shite ideas upon them. I will shy away from addressing the question as to whether or not "Evil and the Mask" is a "shallow book" but will simply state the obvious,

that it is dark. Very very dark. Do not read this book if you have any sort of aversion or sensitivity to extreme violence or cruelty. That being said, while the book is not inundated with such evils, the protagonist's search for exoneration ends up making him out to be a bit like Dexter from that fucking tee vee show. Because with an unlimited amount of money, a young man with personal vendettas can pretty much do whatever he wants.

This is the first piece of Japanese literature I've read that addresses WWII, and it does so only in brief without sugarcoating that country's lack of sufficient resources for their own soldiers. Unsurprisingly, no mention is made of either the atomic bomb or Pearl Harbor though a very general refresher on the US's involvement with Japan's reconstruction is given.

The depiction of a terrorist organization is very very good, but sadly a minor note in the plot. The terrorists want the nation's leaders to impersonate celebrities or else be subjected to assassination, starting with the most bald. (view spoiler) The terrorists rank somewhere in between those of Mao II and Infinite Jest, on the deadly/hilarity scale.

One of the more salient points social criticism herein was the treatment of intellectual property rights in our digital age. Rather than attempt to summarize/analyze the novel's thought on that, I will simply post a long quote (because doing so expresses my view on the matter better than any words of my own ever could :)

If everyone can get their hands on whatever they want for nothing, the people who provide the culture will lose their source of income and the culture will decline. ... Traditional culture, underground culture, he wanted everything to collapse, everything to be done by amateurs. Enjoying things that non-professionals had created themselves in their spare time, enjoying them for free on the net, that would be cool. . . Deep down, people who deliberately distribute other people's music and stuff feel contempt for professionals. And it's not just culture—these days lots of people are contemptuous of everything. Without realizing it, they're searching for things to despise."

The above monologue on copyright and an exegesis on how war yields more monies for the already-rich are worthy of anthologization.

I would not hesitate to recommend it to someone with a penchant for noir or contemporary Japan. The back of the book states that Nakamura is reminiscent of Camus and Doestoevsky, to which I will say yes, and also Highsmith, Mishima and Michael Connelly, of whom I know nothing.

This is a book for which there is more not to like than to like. Because it is easier to hate and be *eville* than to look for the good.

(my review copy provided courtesy of the publisher acting in conjunction with the goodreads First Reads pogrom).

Mobyskine says

It was hard to put this one down. Psychotic and unpredictable. It begins with a dark tale of the past about Fumihiko and Kaori. All the family mess and how it was all started. Quite compelling and somehow tragic.

The 'Shintani era' was one of my favorite plot from the book. I was stunned with the change but it was getting interesting-- the detective stuff, about Kaori, even Ito and the Kuki's mess. I love how Shintani handles everything (okay minus the killing part but I take that as you gotta do what you gotta do). I know

how he was not quite 'well' inside but the way he thinks and cares was somehow looking lovely to me. That chapter of him and Kaori having the last moment together was my favorite-- tense but sincere.

The writing was proper and well, I love the author's style in explaining stuff-- about the cult and the WW2 story. Even with switchbacks plot still it was easy to understand the flow. Character's intro and development was just nice-- loving Mr Detective a lot. And Kaori was lovely and pure, even Aida was okay to me though he was a bit annoying.

So in love with the ending-- from quite a thrilled evil plot to lovable and melancholic sort of. I should get another Fuminori Nakamura later!

Tina *KillMonotony* Wagner says

Ein düsteres Portrait einer eigentlich guten Seele, die zum Preis, ihre Liebe zu schützen, zerrissen wird.

Bereits im Oktober, beim Bloggertreffen von Diogenes auf der Frankfurter Buchmesse, wurde Fuminori Nakamuras neuer Roman „Die Maske“ vorgestellt. Die Vorfreude steigerte sich bis Februar ins Unermessliche, bis das neue Werk dann endlich vor mir lag. Und dann wurde es an einem Tag verschlungen. Bereits letztes Jahr konnte mich Nakamuras „Der Dieb“ überzeugen und so war ich gespannt, wie der neue Roman werden würde. Der Klappentext versprach Spannung und einen Einblick in die menschlichen Abgründe. Es geht um Fumihiro, den letzten Sohn einer Industriegiganten-Familie, den Kukis, der von seinem Vater mit 60 Jahren gezeugt wurde und ganz der Tradition nach als „Geschwür“ aufwachsen soll, das Unheil über die Menschen bringt. Fumihiros Vater adoptiert ein junges Mädchen, das genauso alt ist wie sein jüngster Spross, und hält ihm zu Beginn des Buchs die Ansprache, die Fumihiros Leben verändern soll: Mit vierzehn Jahren würde er ihm die Hölle auf Erden zeigen, die ihm schließlich zu dem machen soll, wozu er genetisch bestimmt ist. Doch Fumihiro hegt andere Pläne, denn er will weder die fragwürdige Tradition fortführen noch seinen Vater, der für ihn nie einer war, über sein Leben bestimmen lassen. Er und Kaori, das adoptierte Mädchen, kommen sich derweil immer näher und als Fumihiro mitbekommt, was sie für seinen Vater für Dinge tun soll, fasst er den Entschluss, der in seinem Inneren bereits reifte, endlich in Worte: Vater muss sterben.

Ist es wirklich immer falsch, einen Menschen zu töten? Ist es ein Verbrechen, jemanden zu töten, der alles daransetzt, dir zu schaden und demjenigen, der dir alles bedeutet? Oder ist das nur unser Egoismus?

Ein spannendes Set-up, ein zu allem entschlossener Protagonist und der Vater, der zu seinem Erzfeind wird, das alles packt Fuminori Nakamura hier zu diesem grandiosen Werk zusammen. Wir begleiten Fumihiro dabei, wie er seinen Mord plant und wie es schließlich zur Ausführung kommt — wenn auch etwas anders, als er sich das vorgestellt hatte. In den folgenden Wochen leidet Fumihiro körperlich und geistig unter seiner Tat, ein Fieber quält ihn und zehrt ihn aus. Später bemüht er sich, sein normales Leben mit Kaori an seiner Seite wieder aufzunehmen, doch ausgemergelt wie er ist, scheint das Gesicht seines toten Vater mehr und mehr Besitz von ihm zu ergreifen. Er ist nicht mehr fähig, ein normales Teenager-Leben zu führen, alles scheint überschattet von dem Mord. Wir springen in die Gegenwart, wo er als junger, von Psychosen zerfressener Mann Kaori von einem Privatdetektiv überwachen lässt, um zu schauen, wie es der Liebe seines Lebens geht und ob sie ebenfalls an ihrer gemeinsamen Vergangenheit leidet. Wir begeben uns in die Abgründe der Menschlichkeit, sehen, wie eine zerrissene Seele zum Untergang eines Menschens führt. Fumihiro ist Opfer der selbst erfüllenden Prophezeiung und letzten Endes tatsächlich zum Geschwür geworden, auch wenn er zunächst niemandem mit seiner negativen Kraft schadet außer sich selbst. Sein Wesen deformiert sich, wird zu einem schwarzen Schmetterling, dessen Gedanken alles zu zerreißen drohen. Sein Vater trichterte ihm stets ein, dass Mord an einem Menschen widernatürlich sei, kein Tier der Welt töte

seine Artgenossen, und so sei es auch mit den Menschen — Kaori merkte es damals und Fumihiko war sich in der ersten Nacht seines Fiebers bereits bewusst gewesen, dass von nun an alles anders sein würde.

Die vollständige Rezension findet ihr auf meinem Blog: <https://killmonotony.de/rezension/fum...>

Nancy Oakes says

As always, you can be content with this short version, or you can click on over here for a wordier one.

My thanks to Soho for my advanced reading copy -- I liked it so much I bought a real copy for my home library. I don't know that I'd classify it as a crime fiction novel -- while there are certainly some smoky, seedy bars and private investigators that conjure up visions of the darkest noir, and although there are a number of crimes committed during the course of this book, it's the philosophical that ultimately takes center stage. It's very dark in nature, so if you're looking to this novel as a leisurely beach read over the summer -- forget about it.

The main character of this novel is Fumihiko Kuki, who the reader first meets at the age of eleven. His elderly father clues him in on a secret -- Fumihiko was born for the special purpose of becoming a "cancer," "a personification of evil" who will "make the world miserable ... make everyone wish they had never been born ... and "make everyone think that the light of virtue does not shine in this world." The family has its own line of cancers, born to "spread a stain over the light of the world," a tradition that Kuki's father has revived. Fumihiko never knew his mother; he lives alone in the big Kuki mansion with a housekeeper, his father (who is often away for business) and Kaori, a young girl his father adopted from an orphanage. Fumihiko detests his father, and suffers from serious depression, which he covers with a "mask of cheerfulness." His situation is untenable, but Kaori is the shining light in his life. He has been told by his father that when he turns 14, he will show him hell. As Fumihiko moves into his thirteenth year, he and Kaori have become very close, but when Fumihiko realizes that his father has been using her to satisfy some perverted desire, it becomes clear to him that the hell he promises Fumihiko for his fourteenth birthday has to do with Kaori. It also becomes clear that the only way he can prevent his father from going ahead with his vile plan is to get rid of him.

Looking back from adult life, Fumihiko tells of being plagued by several questions about acting on what he knows he must do and what society would say about his actions. After weighing what he knows the outside world would tell him against his need to protect Kaori, he is more determined than ever. They might think he was "the evil one," but Fumihiko doesn't care. As he sets his plan in motion, his father tells him that he's "got what it takes to be a cancer," and that he has "all the makings of a real monster." Was his father right? By killing his father would he be stepping into his predestined role? Is he truly his father's son? The story is narrated by the adult Fumihiko, plagued by ambiguity, looking back over his past and relating his present, all the while trying to get a grip on understanding himself and the effects of his "rule-breaking" acts in the bigger, wider world around him. Is his rational examination of his life and deeds a means of confronting the truth or a way to avoid facing it?

Evil and the Mask is an outstanding novel, extremely well written, and I haven't read it in Japanese but the narrative is never halting or awkward so I'd imagine that as a translation it's quite good. There is a lot to this novel and I've pretty much just skimmed the surface here, but from my own casual reader perspective, it's an amazing book that throws out conundrum after conundrum to Fumihiko and to Nakamura's readers as well.

If you would like my advanced reading copy, just be the first to leave a comment here (US only, please,

sorry!) and I'll send it to you, free of charge on your part. If you could also leave an email at oakesn@gmail.com with a mailing address after you leave your comment, I can get it out to you shortly.

Julia says

I received this book from a book exchange partner in Japan. She wanted to send me a book from a Japanese author. I loved this book. It has a storyline, but also reads like a meditation on good and evil.

When he is a child, Fumihiko Kuki told by his father that he was created to be "a cancer on the world." His father feels the world is not worthy, and wants his son to create as much destruction as possible. This is to be his legacy.

Fumihiko rebels against his upbringing. His father adopts a young girl, Kaori, and Fumihiko falls in love with her. But his father has plans for Kaori that Fumihiko does not agree with. These feelings set Fumihiko on the course of his life.

I felt the writing in this book is beautiful. I enjoyed reading it and found beauty in the prose. Fumihiko's story is compelling and I found myself rooting for him the whole time. But his entire family is so screwed up that it feels he can never escape the evil.

Many of the ideas presented in the book are depraved, yet I never felt like the descriptions were too graphic. Instead, it leaves much to the imagination, which may be even more effective. I have read many books by Asian authors, and I like the writing styles I have encountered. I enjoyed this book very much and would definitely read more from this author.

Tony says

EVIL AND THE MASK. (2013). Fuminori Nakamura. ***.

This is another obtuse novel from this Japanese author. It is obtuse in the sense that it contains a beginning and an end, but the middle consists of a maze of action that leaves you breathless and confused. It is the story of a young boy, the last son of his aging father, who is brought up to become a cancer on the world. His father is, obviously, no Santa Claus, and subjects his son to as many evils as possible in order to desensitize him to what his goal in life is to become. The son soon realizes what his father is trying to do, and sees no way out of it other than by killing his father. That's one way of putting a stop to things. The tone of the novel is softened somewhat through the introduction of a love plot between the son and a young woman he has grown up with. She is not just some young woman, she is the personification of all that is good in the world. He vows to keep her away from harm and away from other men like him who have been put in the world to follow the same paths of evil. In most ways, this novel is over the top. In its attempt to keep itself above the norms of other novels, it manages to slip into areas of silliness. There are no shades of gray in this novel; there is only black and white. Of course, much of the evil here is hereditary, passed down within families that control their offspring and help direct them towards their evil ends. The author's noir approach to his novel forces him to increase its unbelievably demonic structure on an ever increasing basis. As I turned each page, I was expecting the book to turn into a graphic novel. Come to think of it, that might have been a great format for this one to begin with.

Kyle Muntz says

This is a very good, maybe incredible novel that somehow manages to stay compelling for 350 pages despite the fact that mostly the characters just sit in the dark and hate life. Mild spoilers: The last 50 pages I'm less fond of, as it's all leading towards a kind of silent, masochistic self-sacrifice (which is incredibly common in Japanese storytelling) that's so familiar I'm sick of putting up with it, especially as the logic behind it here was borderline nonsensical. But the process of getting there was incredible, so this is still definitely a book I'd recommend, and I'm always glad to see more contemporary Japanese writing make its way into English.

Brenda Ayala says

More than anything this is a novel of introspection and philosophy, not terrorism or murder or sabotage. It started out making me believe it would be a novel about a killer—a man who kills when and where he wants without any preamble.

Instead, it was way more of our main character thinking about how he *might* be bad, and then the only truly bad things he does are to protect the woman he loves. Perhaps I wasn't in the mood for an introspective novel; it's October and I wanted bloodshed. I didn't love the novel but I didn't hate it either.

Brian says

I won this book as part of Goodreads' first read program.

The book has an intriguing plot: a boy is raised by his father to be a cancer on the world, thus carrying on the family tradition. It starts off well enough as the father plots to sink his son into moral depravity through a cruel education. There is definitely a darker tone to the novel that at one point is just awkward for the reader (a sex scene between 13 year olds is tough to stomach).

Then the story ventures into the present day where our antihero struggles with his place in the world between what he wants and loves and what he was raised to be. A lot is written without a lot happening in the story. Long stretches of paragraphs go by where the characters philosophize about life, death, good, and evil. When something actually happens, it's good, but there are too many stretches of introspection that really strangle the plot at points.

A fun plot with enough happening to make up for too much talking at points makes this a three star book for me. I'm glad I read it, but have no desire to reread the book or revisit it's characters.

Denise DeSio says

The audio version of the Japanese novel, *Evil and the Mask* by Fuminori Nakamura, and read by Kirby Heyborne (who, incidentally was also the narrator for the audio version of *Gone Girl* and *Heft*), is probably the creepiest love story I've ever heard, made all the more creepy by the stunning audio performance. Yes, I said "love story" because beneath all the murder, suffering, sickness, depression, familial abuse, and philosophical waxing is a young boy's love for a young girl.

Fumihiro is raised by his icky old pervy father, who subscribes to a wacky family tradition of child-raising that mandates men who sire a son after age 60 must groom the boy into a sick, evil dude and release him as a cancer to the world (and you thought your family was crazy?). To this end, Fumihiro's dad adopts a beautiful orphan girl and facilitates an abnormal attachment between her and his young son. As they bond, he screws with their heads in an effort to turn Fumi into as sick a f#%ck as he is. The plan backfires when, as his first act of evil, young Fumihiro makes a little plan of his own - to get rid of his father. He distances himself from Kaori, the beautiful orphan, to protect her from residual evil spillage.

But he loses track of Kaori as the plot twists and turns in bizarre directions which involve changing identities, terrorist activity, Sam Spade-ish detective noir, and even more familial nuttiness in the form of Fumi's older brother, Mikihiko, who was originally raised to be the cancer of the family but was set free when Fumihiro was born. Throughout the book, Nakamura maintains a delicate balance between good and evil, driven mainly by Fumi's pining for the long lost Kaori.

Although the novel temporarily lost its stronghold on me in several places, especially during each set up for a plot twist, it brought me back time and time again with its astute philosophical observations, strong political commentaries on society and culture, and of course Fumi's poignant longing for love.

At times the tone reminded me of famous Japanese author Haruke Murakami's 1Q84 but without the mega-wordiness. Listening to the audio version is especially entertaining when the reader is as versatile and talented as Heyborne. For a real performance treat at the end, pay attention to the monologue by Fumihiro's deranged older brother, Mikihiko. His voice traveling through my earbuds made me shudder down the length of my spine!

C.R. Elliott says

I was able to read an advance copy of the book. It is one of those wonderful books that either pulls you in immediately or repulses you. The book begins with a very dark tone, so dark you aren't sure there is any sort of light at the end of the tunnel. The story is heavy with monologue and you'll get a fair idea individual character's personal philosophies but the story moves forward at a solid pace.

Since others have touched on the story I won't. It did begin as a mystery novel in a sense and I felt that the ending it delivered was very satisfying. There is not much explicit violence or action, in that sense it is more of a psychological thriller. As such I can see myself adding this book to my collection and reading it again.

Neil McCrea says

“What I should like to find is a crime the effects of which would be perpetual, even when I myself do not act, so that there would not be a single moment of my life even when I were asleep, when I was not the cause of some chaos, a chaos of such proportions that it would provoke a general corruption or a disturbance so formal that even after my death its effects would still be felt.”

? Marquis de Sade

The incredibly wealthy Kuki family has found a way to achieve de Sade's goal. When the patriarch of the family feels his mortality approaching, he fathers a child to act as a cancer upon society. The spirit of the child is broken, subjected to such horror that he could not help but grow into a monstrous blight. Our protagonist, Fumihiro, is the latest child born into this troublesome lineage. As soon as he learns of his

birthright he begins to rebel against it, but is this rebellion the very attitude most likely to turn him into the monster his father desires?

Comparisons to Dostoyevsky are inevitable and appropriate. Nakamura takes an issue of great moral and ethical complexity and flips it around to look at it from as many angles as possible, and he manages this through the actions of characters that are never less than realistic. On the downside, there are a few moments in the third quarter of the novel where the sense of setting and physical space are almost lost, and we are treated to many pages of nothing but talking heads. Additionally, Nakamura is not quite as thorough in exploring the human soul as Dostoyevsky was, but then again who is? In the end this is an ambitious, thoughtful novel that succeeds more than it fails.

Rise says

How does one unleash maximum evil? The novel by the young Japanese writer Nakamura Fuminori, 36, provides many avenues to explore the filthy black nature of murder, impersonation, wars, more wars, terrorism, copycat terrorism. It features an antihero (Fumihiko Kuki) who was chosen by his father to succeed him as a "cancer" in the world, as the embodiment of pure evil. The family business is in fact the very instrument of evil as it built upon destructive, anarchic aims through the trade of war materiel and ammunition. Here's the long-term plan of Fumihiko's elder brother, also destined to be another malignant tumor in society.

Most of the companies of which I'm the major shareholder deal with war in one form or another, from brokering arms deals overseas to rebuilding after the wars are over.... I'm putting all of my efforts into abolishing the article in the constitution that says that Japan can't export weapons. If we can repeal that we'll be able to sell locally produced weapons to other countries, then whenever a war breaks out we can reap vast profits. The arms business is a gold mine, because weapons are consumables. The longer the war drags on—in other words, the more people are killed—the more money we make. Japan's superior technology will take the world by storm. Imagine we develop a fighter plane. We can include the maintenance in the contract, the whole works. It's a gravy train with no end. Obviously it's not the money I'm interested in. What I'm looking at, as an end in itself, is hundreds of thousands of people dying in those economic currents.

War as the modern industrial complex of evil—an efficient machine ran by capitalists, workers, and soldiers of atrocities, fed by the sustainable energy of constant warmongering. War as the ubiquitous laboratory for inhumanity.

This is a topical novel, inevitably invoking the two world wars, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the War on Terror, the many wars we seem to never tire of making. It is a novel of its time, particularly relevant given the recent pronouncement of Japanese officials bent on amending the country's pacifist constitution (embodied in Article 9 of Japanese constitution).

Fumihiko, shaken by his father's plans for him, set into motion a sequence of events that give readers a peek into the twisted minds of warlords and terrorists. Billed as a Japanese noir detective story, this novel avoids the excesses of the genre by being restrained in its presentation of violence. Sometimes it's too restrained, too understated, as to become more and more creepy with its slow resolution of the plot. All the celebrated murders and wars in the novel are not described as they happen but only indirectly, either told in conversation by the characters or reported on television and newspapers. The reader may be privy to the planning of a murder or terrorist act but he does not witness its full execution. All we get are accounts of the crimes.

"There's this group doing strange things recently, isn't there? Like simultaneous explosions in different places. The ones calling themselves JL? They're on the news all the time. The media are condemning them, calling them 'The Invisible Terrorists,' but that's just spurring them on. It looks like there have already been copycats as well."

...

"And now they've made a threat. 'We're going to assassinate all the politicians, starting with the baldest. If you want to stop us, the Prime Minister has to hold a press conference and do a perfect impression of the singer Hiromi Go.' Wouldn't that be hysterical?"

The Prime Minister channeling Hiromi Go? How bad can that be? See Goldfinger 99 for reference.

The noir detective aspect of *Evil and the Mask* is apparent from various devices: brooding, angsty protagonist, bleak atmosphere, femme fatale figure, and, well, a detective. The novel opens with an extract from the diary of a detective who accidentally got involved in the case. This, however, turns out to be not so much about detection and problem-solving as about the timeless superhero story of good versus evil. Important questions are raised. Is evil encoded in genes, embedded in tissues like a cancer? Where is the place of personal/private transactions of evil within the larger context of public/wholesale wars?

Evil and the Mask turns out to be a novel of ideas, with the evildoing characters speaking in the dialectical manner of Plato. By the end of the book, philosophical exchanges with cold-blooded murderers, corrupt businessmen, and budding terrorists lead to some plausible ideas about how evil spreads like a happy virus. No talking cats or leeches falling from the sky in this book. The novel turns out to be well-grounded in reality. That probably makes it more uncanny.

In his preface to *The Invention of Morel* by Adolfo Bioy Casares—via Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Paris Review* interview—Borges said that all great novels of the twentieth century are detective novels. His examples: *The Turn of the Screw*, William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, *The Castle*. Unlike the traditional detective novel, the specific detective novel he had in mind are those that are not concerned about the solution to the crime but to the investigation itself. Robbe-Grillet continues his reading of Borges:

Detective novels are consumer products, sold by millions, and are made in the following way: there are clues to an event, say a murder, and someone comes along and puts the pieces together in order that truth may be revealed. Then it all makes sense. In our novels what is missing is "sense." There is a constant appeal to sense, but it remains unfulfilled, because the pieces keep moving and shifting and when "sense" appears it is transitory. Therefore, what is important is not to discover the truth at the end of the investigation, but the process itself.

The process is all that matters. The process is the novel itself. Given the definition of Borges, I would say that *Evil and the Mask* can be considered a traditional detective novel. The truth is discovered in the end; all clues are accounted for. Still, the novelist Nakamura defies some expectations of the detective novel through an unusual approach to the determination of crime. The crime is already determined from the start. What the rest of the novel does is unfold the investigation process of the criminals' investigation into *their own selves*, how they determine the extent of their guilt and punishment. To some extent, it is an investigation not of the crimes which are transparently presented but of the criminal intents. If that makes sense. In addition, the detection in the novel is not really undertaken by the detective ("someone [who] comes along and puts the pieces together in order that truth may be revealed") in the book. The detection is made by the criminals themselves. In the end, the detective scratches his head, just as puzzled as he was when he entered the picture halfway through the story. He may have a theory about the crime but he is as clueless as ever.

This is only Nakamura's second novel to appear in English translation. He is a prolific writer and appears to

be a critical favorite, having won prestigious prizes in Japan like the Akutagawa Prize and the Kenzabur? ?e Prize.

In *Evil and the Mask*, it's not only terrorists and detectives who appear to be almost invisible. The book's translators, Satoko Izumo and Stephen Coates, seem to be peripheral too as they have produced a version that is almost invisible, save for some cultural references, in the target language. It captures what must have been Nakamura's clean and spare diction and his appeal to universal and timeless themes.

I received a review copy from the publisher. Borges/Robbe-Grillet on the detective novel is borrowed from Mala's review of Robbe-Grillet's The Eraser.
