



A Small Charred Face

Kazuki Sakuraba , Jocelyne Allen (Translation)

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Even monsters need families.

What are the “bamboo”?

They are from China.

They look just like us.

They live by night.

They drink human lifeblood, but otherwise keep their distance.

And every century, they grow white blooming flowers.

A boy name Kyo is saved from the precipice of death by Bamboo, a vampire born of the tall grasses. They start an enjoyable, yet strange shared life together, Kyo and the gentle Bamboo. But for Bamboo, communication with a human being is the greatest sin.

A Small Charred Face Details

Date : Published September 19th 2017 by Haikasoru

ISBN : 9781421595412

Author : Kazuki Sakuraba , Jocelyne Allen (Translation)

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Horror, Fantasy, Paranormal, Vampires, Fiction, Novels, Light Novel

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From Reader Review A Small Charred Face for online ebook

D says

Do we really need another vampire novel? I ask myself even as I picked this book up. I liked the idea of vampires being called Bamboo, and they *are* bamboo, by the way. Their blood is not like our blood and when they reach the end of the natural (and long) span of their life, they turn into flowers. It's a beautiful idea, and the joke of literal vegetarian vampires (the Bamboo have rules about not drinking human blood and killing humans) didn't escape me.

The Bamboo came from China to Japan and have set up rules so they could live in relative harmony with humans. This novel is cut into three parts:

'A Small Charred Face' tells us the story of Kyo, whose family gets killed by a group of gangsters as a warning to his stepdad (who slept with the boss's mistress). Knowing that they're coming for him soon, Kyo hides in a room and is surprised to see a young man drinking his dead mother's blood. He asks the young man to kill him before the gangsters could do the job, but bound by the rules not to kill humans, the Bamboo (whose name is Mustah) decides to fly back home with Kyo instead.

Now it's also against the rules to talk, let alone live with a human. But Mustah and his partner Yoji decide to raise Kyo up as if he is their son. Or daughter. Since the gangsters are still looking for Kyo, he is forced to live as a girl and he takes on his dead sister's name.

'I Came to Show You Real Flowers' (Incidentally, it sounds like this is the title the book came out in in the original Japanese) is about Kyo's Bamboo friend Marika. After Kyo dies of old age, Marika adopts the young orphan under Kyo's care. Momo helps Marika continue in her quest to kill evildoers (and breaking the rules of the Bamboo) until Momo gets older and decides she wants to settle down. She decides she can't be with Marika any more and leaves her behind.

'You Will Go To the Land of the Future' goes back into the past when the Bamboo are still living in China. Told from the point of view of the king's fifth daughter, we see how the Bamboo are pressured into moving farther into the mountains to avoid the tension that's growing between the Bamboo community and the human settlements surrounding them. It is the time of the Cultural Revolution in China and the educated masses are sent to the countryside to farm, and these people aren't used to the idea of the Bamboo, nor as trusting as the original villagers are.

We see a Yoji here as a much younger man. And also how the king of the Bamboo whom we meet in the first part came to be in charge of the Bamboo in Japan.

All in all, I'm pretty torn about Kazuki Sakuraba. I really enjoyed this novel, don't get me wrong. Sakuraba knows how to write emotions and some of the scenes made me tear up a little bit (one of the themes in the book is saying good bye. Which you know, despite being about near-immortal vampires actually happens a lot in this novel) and her characters are vivid and strong. The stories tie together pretty nicely and the progression is very good. Also, the bond between Kyo, Mustah and Yoji is probably one of my favourite things to happen in light novels.

But what bothers me is the language sometimes. Here's a bit where Momo confronts Marika about her life as a Bamboo:

'This! This! This!' Momo hit me. 'I won't let you kill people anymore! Marika! I won't let you be a murderer! I mean, like, not a single person in this world deserves to be murdered. E-e-everyone--they're trying as hard as they can, just to make it through this life. I finally get that now. Uh-huh. I didn't understand it before....' etcetera.

And they all talk like that! Even Yoji the old Bamboo from China sounds like a young girl on occasion. Bamboo from ancient China? Also talk, like, you know. Like this.

And I'm not sure if it's a translation problem; Jocelyne Allen is the same person who translated Kabi Nagata's manga and I had no problems with that, so I'm assuming she translated this from the language of the original. (On a different note, I'm kind of confused as to why we suddenly shifted to calling Bamboo 'takezoku' in the last part. I personally like 'takezoku' because it calls attention to itself without being as jarring as seeing Bamboo like a proper noun, so I don't have complaints but why didn't we get takezoku from the start?)

So yeah, while the language (and the characters) tend to have this frenetic manga energy to them it wasn't bad enough that I wanted to give up reading. I really like the characters and cared about what happened to them. A pretty good light read. Sakuraba has another novel published by Haika Soru and I might check that out as well.

Melanie Gannon says

Three interconnected stories bring us into the lives of the Bamboo, a species of vampires from China who live secretly in Japan among humans. The first, longest of the stories introduces us to Kyo, who is saved from death by a Bamboo and ends up being raised by a pair of them. As he grows up, we share in Kyo's sadness and hope in sharing his life with a pair of gentle immortals, and how his life changes as he is forced to leave behind what he loves most.

The second and third stories follow minor Bamboo characters from the first. We learn more about Marika, the rebellious loner Kyo befriended long ago, and about the royal Bamboo who lived in China long before our original story begins.

The most major thing that bothered me about the book was the translation, a lot of interjections that read weirdly in English.

Overall, its a good read if you like short, non-scary stories about immortals and found families.

Rob McMonigal says

It's always cool to see a different kind of vampire story, and this fits the bill. It's probably even better in its native language, but there are definitely some situations where the translation here loses some of the flow of the writing.

In a set of interlocking stories, Sakuraba introduces us to the Bamboo, a group of vampires whose lives are akin to grass, but still have the desire to feast on humans. Bamboo aren't supposed to interact with humans, but our two main Bamboo can't allow a young boy to die at the hands of evil, so they raise him in secret.

But boys always rebel against their "parents" and the tragic costs arrive all too soon.

It's a very haunting story that is probably closer to the post-modern stories I used to read in my early 20s than, say, a strict horror story. The horror elements aren't front and center, so those looking for more of an updated Gothic sense will be disappointed. There's also the matter of the third story, which is why this one goes down from 4 stars to 3 for me (it's the "origin" of the modern Bamboo, and it's telegraphed from a mile away). However, I like the different take on vampires, the idea of them trying to be parents is a cool one, and the slow build did work for me.

Jon says

This was interesting. I'm trying to read more books by authors that aren't "straight white american males", so this I totally outside of a thing that I would usually read, although you could call it fantasy-ish, I guess?

Regardless, this was pretty good. It's almost written as a short novella and then several short stories, but they're all interconnected and related, although it took me a bit to figure out which was what. It was an effective technique though, I thought.

Anyways. It's short, and was enjoyable, although I didn't love it. If it sounds interesting, you'll probably think something similar.

Nikmaack says

Oddly written, but quite a fun and surprisingly emotional read. There's nothing on the cover or back of the book to indicate this is a young adult book, but it certainly reads like one. I found it in the regular horror section of a bookstore, so maybe they don't want to market it as young adult.

It's oddly written in the sense that the dialogue is a little forced: Huh? Hmm. What? Aah! What?! These pepper the text, making the dialogue oddly foreign and "manga" like. But instead of being annoying, I found this a charming stylistic choice.

The book makes all sorts of unexpected leaps and bounds, which kept me reading. It's about vampires -- or "bamboo" as they are called in this book. You'd normally never catch me reading a vampire book on purpose. This book does interesting things with the genre. It's the relationships between characters that makes the book romantic, touching, perhaps a little corny, but worth reading.

I keep trying to read "western" horror novels but find them so dull. It's the Japanese who seem to be willing to go darker, weirder, more fun. They take risks western writers avoid. And the writing is so much more simple and straightforward. I can't stand the purple prose of the flowery gothic horror writers. The Japanese avoid all that, somehow.

I will look for more by this author.

Yve says

Vampires + plant monsters = the way to lure me into reading anything.

All three stories are about carnivorous humanoid grass monsters called the Bamboo. The first story shows the Bamboo through the eyes of a human, a boy who was raised as a girl by two Bamboo after his family was brutally killed by mobsters (I liked this one the best because it was super over the fucking top). The second story is narrated by a Bamboo who was once a human, inadvertently turned into a Bamboo when the mob hires the monsters to brutally murder *her* family.

Then, the third story is narrated by a born Bamboo of the royal family back in their ancestral home in the Chinese mountains. This is where there's a big missed opportunity. The two stories about the Bamboo emigrants in Japan make you wonder about their history, and then the last story doesn't explain much about their history at all. Why are the Bamboo human in appearance? What is their real relationship to humans? The narrator refers to herself as a monster. The Bamboo apparently take human sacrifices from villagers. But it is also implied that no humans really fear the Bamboo until students come from the city during the Cultural Revolution. And it's also implied that the Bamboo can live just as well on the blood of livestock as on human blood. And that in addition to humans being infected by Bamboo, Bamboo can just be born and automatically have a human shape. None of this makes sense. Maybe it's dumb to expect a fantasy book to make sense but there should at least be internal logic. The narrator as a Bamboo should be affected by these questions or at least have a consistent way of looking at the world. This was lacking.

I appreciate what the author was trying to do, to show the story of the Bamboo from three different angles. But in the end it revealed there was not so much detail to show when you look too closely.

Becky Spratford says

Review in Booklist and on the blog <http://raforall.blogspot.com/2017/08/...>

Sylvia Coronado says

I quickly got bored. The first story was by far the best then it really fizzled out. I'm not sure if it was the translation, but the three stories read very similarly style-wise even with different characters. And the "like" used heavily throughout got old. It was like a teenager was reading the story back to me. Sorry, this one was painful to get through.

mina reads™? says

3.5

My rating is based solely on the first story because that's the only one I read. I really liked the story but the writing style was totally not for me and after a quick glance I didn't really care enough to continue on to the

other two stories.

Reading Bifrost says

“But Mustah and I have kept the flame that you are a secret for almost seven years now. Because this joy is greater than anything else we’ve known. Rescuing you, helping you grow up, and finally sending you out into the world. Our bodies are cold, and yet our hearts are filled with warmth.”

The book is divided into three separate stories. The first is the main, and longest, story. The second story ties up loose ends with a character from the first story, and the last story goes back centuries before and explains more about the Bamboo and their culture.

The story really reminds me of the older Japanese movie, “Moonchild” starring Gackt and Hyde. The world built around Kyo and his Bamboo, Mustah and Yoji, is tyrannical. Mafia (probably Yakuza) and gangs control the city and the people.

Mustah finds Kyo after he becomes an orphan and contemplates at first before taking him in with Yoji, another Bamboo he lives with. It follows Kyo growing up with his saviors, struggling with being human among the Bamboo, and living in a torn world. It turns heart-wrenching as he starts to realize Mustah and Yoji’s future plans, and a full on tear-jerker from then on.

The novella reads like you would expect of a manga; the dialog isn’t what you’d be used to in a regular novel. It uses a lot of ‘filler words’ (uh, hmm, like...) that’s a part of normal speech but is often left out of written dialog.

“Right! Humans get cold, y’know, Yoji! I totally forgot!”

“They do, huh? I didn’t know that to begin with. So listen then.”

“Huh? What?”

“You have to take proper care of this kid, okay, Mustah?”

“...Yeah.”

“Don’t make it seem like such a huge hassle. You’re the one who brought him home. And.”

“Hmm?”

“And look how happy you are now. Being reminded after all this time that human beings get cold.”

“...Well, there is that.”

Overall, A Small Charred Face was a delightful story with amazing, lovable characters.

Elizabeth Fitzgerald says

The book was actually three interconnected stories and I enjoyed the different perspectives they brought and the way they filled out the life cycle and history of the vampires. Comes with trigger warnings for sexual assault and animal death.

Robbie says

Another 3.5 star book that I'm rounding up. If you pick this up and really like the first two stories, skip the last one: it's out of place. The first two are kind of dreamy and have a strange draw to them. It's not like the story really pushes them along so much as I felt drawn along by some odd charm. The first story was very moving. There was a lot that I liked about the second, such as Mariko's innocent naivete mixed with her monstrous nature. The third story, the origin of the Bamboo in Japan, just wasn't that interesting. The pseudo-realistic, excited, and occasionally vacuous dialog that worked reasonably well in the first two stories made the entire species look silly in the third. I mean, oh, well, um...the royal family wasn't that impressive and the story of the fifth child and how she sent the sixth to Japan wasn't that interesting. If I ranked the stories individually on a 7 point scale with 7 being the best and 1 being don't bother, the first would be just over 6 stars, the second 5, and the third would be 3. Because the first story is the bulk of the book, I'm letting it pull the total up to the 3.5/5 instead of the 2.5/5 that they would all average out if they were weighted equally.

Madeline says

This book is three interconnected vampire stories. Two of the stories are okay. Worth reading, but not spectacular. The first one though? Just perfect. Two daddy vampires rescue and raise a human kid. They are such a loving family that I want to wrap them up in a blanket and protect them forever. Precious. ?

Rachel (Life of a Female Bibliophile) says

See even more book reviews at: <http://www.lifeofafemalebibliophile.com/>

One of my goals in the past couple of years has been to read more translated fiction. I set my eyes upon this one as the synopsis hooked me. Though vampire stories have been written time and time before, but *A Small Charred Face* is a bit different.

The story is told through the first perspective by Kyo, our narrator. He witness the death of his family and survives by the help of a bamboo (vampire) called Mustah who decides to take care of him. Joined by Yoji, another fellow bamboo, they take him under their wing until he turns eighteen,

The story starts out where Kyo is young and then readers watch him grow up as he lives with the bamboo. The concept for vampires in this book is similar to other tales due to the bamboo's legend, behavior, and the societal rules. But Sakuraba still manages to put a twist on these the vampire trope. It was also interesting reading Kyo's interactions with Mustah and Yoji. They become his father figures since he has none and they

re-learn what's it's like to be human as he learns more about the nature of the bamboo.

The book is fairly short and reads more like a novella than a novel. The first part of the novel is from Kyo's pov, the second part follows Mariko (a bamboo), and the final part is in the perspective a royal bamboo from where they originated in their original mountain region in China.

The writing style is sometimes musical in the dialogue but has a choppy narrative which was a bit distracting at times. The first half of the book was exciting and interesting while the second half felt a bit flat for me. What kept me entertained was the constant flip-flop through the past and present as we learn more about the bamboo's nature and how they somehow "co-exist" with humans. While some bamboo are kind-hearted and enjoy the company of humans like Mustah and Yoji, others are vicious and bloodthirsty.

This novel ended up being just "okay" for me. The concept was good, but the writing style was not my favorite. I would try another book from this author in the future.

Leslie says

Closer to a 2.5 rating. I picked this book up on a complete whim. I expected it to be scary since it was labeled in the Horror section. This is not a scary story although it deals with vampires. The book itself is like 3 short stories all interconnected. The first one is the best and it probably should have been the only story. The second story is okay and the third was boring. I think I may have enjoyed this more had I not thought it would be creepy. The translation is weird in parts too. Overall, it was a decent read for a book I had zero idea about.
