



Zaregoto, Book 2: The Kubishime Romanticist

NisiOisiN , take (Illustrator)

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College is a whole new adventure, rife with challenges, opportunities, and cold-blooded killers.

Fresh from unmasking an assassin on a posh island paradise, Ii-chan is finally an ultra-cool college student—jaded, sarcastic, and not exactly consumed by academic ambition. Now more interested in angst and anomie than in catching killers, Ii-chan figures that danger is a thing of the past. Wrong! There's a homicidal maniac loose in Kyoto, a perp with the soul of an artist whose talent is apparent in the inspired way he festoons his crime scenes with body parts.

But then murder hits much closer to home. Hours after attending a friend's birthday party, Ii-chan learns that the guest of honor, a pretty co-ed, has been found strangled to death. What's more, Ii-chan is the prime suspect. The lackadaisical college kid had better hope that his crime-solving skills weren't just a fluke, because the killer is within striking distance . . . of him.

Zaregoto, Book 2: The Kubishime Romanticist Details

Date : Published June 22nd 2010 by Del Rey (first published May 8th 2002)

ISBN : 9780345505781

Author : NisiOisiN , take (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Novels, Light Novel, Mystery, Crime, Asian Literature, Japanese Literature, Fiction

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??????(?)????!! ricecrackers says

I had this preordered for when it came out (last year?) and proceeded to read it within a day. I read it again during the spring of this year and I enjoyed it both times. The book helped to further convince me that Nisio Ishin is one of my favorite authors. I highly recommended it to those who enjoyed the beheading cycle as its just as addicting and piquant as the first. As I read it I wanted more and more, even though I was thoroughly stuffed, so I just kept eating, I mean reading, until I finished it all in one go. Then I was left satisfied with the novel as a whole but badly desiring a translation third. Sadly, it seems that the third one is probably not going to be translated any time in the near future. There is no cliffhangers or anything, I simply love his writing and the characters in the series that I want more. The only downside, aside from the lack of a third translation, is that Kunagisa is more a side character who only appears, aside from phone calls and emails, in the final chapter. However, her absence is easily made up for with the heavy presence of Aikawa Jun. Overall, its a bit darker than the first and its ending once again managed to surprise me in new ways.

Kathleen says

First of all, this book is a light novel, so I was not expecting much from the writing. The writing is solid, but not amazing.

What is most appealing to me in the Zaregoto books is the main character's personality and thoughts. Which the reader gets a lot of since it's written 1st person POV. I find the plot secondary. If the books had a good plot, then I would have given the book a better rating. Damaged characters have always held an appeal for me and I-chan is damaged goods.

Chin Jian Xiong says

The ultimate book for human-hating humans.

If there wasn't a bias towards Light Novels, this would supersede Catcher in the Rye as the book that alienated teenagers turn to for their fix. Actually the best part is that it takes place in University (Ishin's own private university that he dropped out from to be exact) - so that's already going beyond the Catcher age demographic.

Supposedly Nisio Ishin wrote this entire book in 3 days. That's total nonsense.

Alice Dillon says

My opinion of the first book in this series was mostly just that it was a very intelligent murder mystery with excellent twists and turns right to the end, but this one manages to also go brilliantly deep into Ii-chan's

character and the deconstruction of the facade he puts up to everyone around him, the reader and even himself. I had someone telling me before I read this that he really loved the main character. From the first book, I couldn't see it, but now I hold a much deeper love for Ii-chan and most definitely want to read on. The plot itself, although it isn't particularly fast-paced and relies a lot on dialogue (as is the light novel format), is well worth it. The twist in the tale is almost as good as the first book, but the bigger twist is more how your opinion on Ii-chan changes even right at the last few pages, shifting your perspective on a lot of the earlier conversations depicted.

If you enjoyed the first book, or even if you were left feeling slight disappointed by it, I definitely recommend this one.

Benjamin Kass says

.....

This is one of the most brilliant books I've ever read. Nisioisin, self-indulgent bastard that he is, is on an entirely different level of skill from other writers and he clearly knows it. The plotting, the characters, even the pseudo-philosophical asides...it was wonderful. I'd never thought I'd enjoy a serial-killer side character quite so much, and I found the first couple deaths to be very affecting. This was one of the most enjoyable books I'd ever read, up until the third murder.

Unfortunately, Nisioisin turns it all into a sick joke at the end. Again. He did this in the first book too, and I'd be an idiot for falling for it again if he wasn't so good. Maybe I am an idiot anyways. In the end, it's all nonsense. As he told you it would be in the beginning.

I look forward to reading further into this series only to be tricked again and again.

Victor Luo says

I didn't like this sequel compared to the first one because it felt overly dependent on dialogue rather than action. Albeit, some of the casually nihilist philosophies thrown around are good for a quick amusement, the book's overall stagnant nature kept me from fully enjoying the characters or the mystery. All in all, an average attempt, though I look forward to seeing if Del Rey will translate any more of the series.

Michael says

Nisioisin just has this way of writing dialogue, whether it is internal or external, that makes me not want to stop reading. Ii-chan even as emotionless as he is, a defective product in his own words, Nisiosin makes him legit interesting. Also this is another brilliant murder mystery. I didn't see the twists coming at all, and yes twists. It's one of those things where even if you were to guess one of the twists, good luck guessing both. While I really enjoyed Decapitation, Strangulation was even better! Between this series and the Monogatari series, people should not sleep on Nisioisin and his light novels. They are immensely enjoyable with fantastic writing.

Luna says

For a 300-page light novel, this book is damn heavy.

Kubikiri Cycle was NisiOisiN's debut novel, and it's about what you'd expect from him if you've watched Katanagatari or read any of the Monogatari Series. The entire narrative has a mystery weaved into it, and spends the vast majority of the novel trying to mislead you in various ways. Mislead you into believing certain things about certain characters, or into misunderstanding what has or is actually happening. It's also a work with strong character personalities and a heavy helping of philosophical offerings.

The difference is that the Zaregoto Series, in direct comparison to the Monogatari Series, seems to focus more on the mysteries than the characters. The characters are still a strong element in the first novel, but they seem almost secondary to the nonsensical mystery taking place in the foreground. Whenever the mystery isn't developing, it focuses on the characters - so it feels like something is always happening, even when the characters are really just waiting for the next part of the mystery to unfold.

The reason I bring up Kubikiri Cycle when what I'm supposed to be talking about is Kubishime Romanticist is because I want to emphasise that Zaregoto is not the kind of series where you can pick up any book in the series and read it without context. This series would not have nearly as much impact if Kubishime Romanticist was the first novel and Kubikiri Cycle was the next. While Kubikiri Cycle is mostly a traditional mystery, it gets pretty crazy toward the end.

Kubishime Romanticist is *not* a traditional mystery. Not in any sense of the word. There is nothing that is normal about this novel.

Putting aside our bizarre protagonist, Kubishime Romanticist features a serial killer as one of the more prominent characters. And he's the most normal character of the lot of them.

Kubishime Romanticist is unassuming at first, seemingly focusing on our protagonist's daily life back in university. What happens when he's not being dragged to a small island by a bizarre girl who wants to gather the best geniuses in the world in one place by the adorable Kunagisa. Maybe Ii-chan's a bit drab and incomplete as a person, but that doesn't stop Mikoko Aoii from taking an interest in him. Whoever she is. Apparently they've been acquaintances for a while?

Anyway, it's a nice and insightful look into Ii-chan unfiltered. Until the inevitable happens. Until someone is murdered. It's time for things to get serious once more. And when they do, Mikoko is dragged along for the ride. And it's a wild ride at that. Kubishime Romanticist is an absolute monstrosity in terms of themes and mysteries this time around. There's almost no chance you'll guess everything, even if all the clues you need are present the whole while, and that's part of the charm of any well-written mystery.

But Zaregoto takes things further and plays on all the information you'll have gleaned about the series from the first novel. About the characters. About the mysteries. And of course, about the themes. Outstandingly, it still follows the same structure as the previous novel while still managing to subvert and avert the trappings you might expect.

Kubishime Romanticist uses the mystery more as a backdrop for the characters this time. Interwoven with murder mysteries, motives and ostensibly trite wall etchings are mysteries about the characters themselves. In particular, this time around, Zaregoto shines the spotlight on our chronically un-involved Villager B-type

protagonist, Ii-chan. About the only thing we know about him from Kubikiri Cycle is that his deductive skills are up to scratch (but, of course, are no match for Humanity's Strongest Contractor), he wants nothing to do with anything aside from Kunagisa, and he's no genius. He's so unimportant to the world, to the mystery, and to everyone in attendance that he doesn't even provide his name. He's totally irrelevant. And, I'll spoil you here, he still doesn't give us any name other than Ii-chan for readers to latch onto in this sequel, either.

What better way, then, to dissect Ii-chan than to have him meet with his mirror image; his doppelganger? This novel is filled to the brim with murder and mayhem, but it dedicates almost as much time to the relationship between Zeruzaki Hitoshiki and Ii-chan. Encounters and conversations and debates and complaints and sentiments. It's all here. Ii-chan unmasked. And it's all a great read. Many of their conversations bring a lot of much-needed insight into Ii-chan as a person, and also flesh out Zeruzaki as his own person. It makes for an interesting read.

The dramatic moments are incredibly thrilling and gripping to read. I read 150 pages in one day and 150 pages the next. The B-story with Zeruzaki takes over when the mystery isn't developing and keeps you on the edge of your seat. When events related to the murder mystery roll back around, the suitably grim and vile atmosphere immerse you in a different way.

This is a solo operation this time. Kunagisa is a mere footnote, and Humanity's Strongest has bigger fish to fry. It's all on our resourceful protagonist to solve the mystery and unravel it all. To bring justice, as it were. It makes for a very different read than Kubikiri Cycle's more co-operative effort.

It's because there are no other characters to take the spotlight from Ii-chan that we get to see first-hand what lengths our apathetic protagonist will go to in order to bring everything to a conclusion.

If Kubikiri Cycle was nonsensical from start to finish, Kubishime Romanticist is a real riot.

The funny moments are surprisingly few in a NisiOisiN novel, but in a novel narrated by Ii-chan of all people, it's not hard to see why. It may be angst-ridden, but the light atmosphere that Zeruzaki brings along with him when he shows up prevents Kubishime Romanticist from becoming too heavy, as strange as that might be to say about a serial killer. As soon as something vile happens, a short breather soon follows. But as much as this novel ends on a lighter note, I wouldn't say it's a particularly up-lifting read. In fact, it's outright unpleasant.

It might all be nonsense, but the senseless nature of it all rings rather foul. But in a good way.

This is a well-weaved mystery with much stronger characters than the previous effort. It's better than the first in every way. This is a fantastic sequel, and I can't wait for the third novel, if it'll ever come out in English. The more you read, the harder it is to put down. It starts off somewhat weak, but once it kicks into gear, the themes this time around are a lot stronger and they're handled much better than in Kubikiri Cycle. NisiOisiN's fascination with the talented versus the untalented never caught my interest.

Instead, this is a story about humans and their failures. There are no ideals here.

It's the story of how a fatal wound couldn't stop anything, and of how an even more fatal wound resolved everything without further incident.

Maybe it's even a story of love and loss, though I think it's very disrespectful to frame it like that. There's certainly nothing lovely or romantic about it. This story is twisted beyond measure.

I'm sure it's nothing but a story of hatred. For others. For oneself. Maybe even for the whole world.

The fatal wound in this story; in all of these stories, is suffocation.

This is a story about those who have to keep living despite being unable to breathe, and those who couldn't.

Zen says

4.5 stars.

This book did not disappoint at all. The first in the series was rather on the brilliant side, so I had to check out the second one. I couldn't find it anywhere so ultimately I had to order it, and boy was it worth the wait.

Some of the characters from the first book were still there, as well as a few additions to the cast. The thing about the Zaregoto books is that you never see what's coming. It's kinda like an Agatha Christie mystery in the sense that you can never figure out who the murderer is, and when you do find out, it's delivered with an incredible explanation that you would've never figured out at all.

I would give this 5 stars, but the writing was a bit off for me. I don't know if a different translator was used with this book, but I felt that the writing style was a lot better in the first one.

Either way, this is a fantastic read and I do recommend it!

Asch-Lee says

This was a really interesting book, completely different than the first one in the series. A lot of twists and turns will definitely keep any reader on the edge of their seat. I couldn't stop reading it. Some parts were a little strange and somewhat hard to relate to, but a great book nevertheless.

D says

I'm a NisiOisiN fan because of this novel. It has all the elements I like: an impossible murder (this is a recurring theme for the Zaregoto novels, while Nisio eventually veered away from the usual locked room mystery tropes, impossible murders are still very much at its core), some gruesome details, a lot of background flavour, and an enjoyable cast. But also, lest we forget: an unreliable narrator. We already know Ikkun isn't the most trustworthy character in the series, but this is where we start realising just *why* so many people hated him in Kubikiri Cycle and just how far his apathy and ruthlessness can go.

In Kubishime Romanticist we see more of Ikkun's life at university and his lack of interest in making connections there. He meets Aoii Mikoko, a classmate whom he had forgotten entirely despite working with her on a project previously. She seems to know what makes him tick and is very invested in becoming his friend.

Of course, this being Ikkun, murders start happening when he's around. In this case and unlike in Kubikiri Cycle where he's really just caught in the crossfire, the events in the second novel happened because Ikkun is there. It's like adding a bad variable and having the program crash. He pretends that none of this is related to him, that he's just a bystander, but admits after some pressing by Aikawa that he has manipulated some of the events to suit his needs. We're quite free to judge him for his warped sense of balance and justice: the novels and Ikkun himself has told us from the start that he's an atrocious human being.

Another element that drives this nail home is the existence of Zerzaki Hitoshiki, the Kyoto Prowler who kills indiscriminately. Ikkun sees Zerzaki as his mirror image (and vice versa). In short: had Ikkun not failed in life, he would have become Zerzaki. And had Zerzaki not been successful, he would have become Ikkun. Needless to say, their relationship is built on self-hatred, hating each other, and also a sense of comfort. They spend a LOT of time talking to each other. At one point even when Ikkun is on the verge of collapse.

But the humour of their conversations aside, it's easier to get a grip on what Ikkun is really like via Zerzaki. No matter how charming he could be, Zerzaki has no morals and is quite honest about his deficiencies. With him mirroring Ikkun like this, we get a better picture of what Ikkun is like without the filter of unconditional love that comes from Tomo in the first novel.

Mostly I love this novel because of one question Ikkun asks at the beginning: what counts as a fatal wound? He continues to say that a fatal wound is when you die but continue to live. For Ikkun this is when he realises he's not a genius and would never be a genius. Living most of your life thinking you're hot stuff and looking down on other people, only to face real genius somewhere along the line and realising one is in fact mediocre? That counts as a fatal wound. I needed to hear that at the time. Just like I think Ikkun needed to meet Zerzaki.

Anyway, this edition is the Vertical reprint of the DelRey version translated by Greg Moore, but with some revisions. This time I did make some comparisons, so if you care about that sort of thing:

1, they took out the honorifics. To people who got confused about Ikkun calling people Tomo-chan and Aikawa-san, no need to fret. Vertical removed all that. I can't say I like it, seeing as how Ikkun uses honorifics to distance himself from people, but that's Vertical's call in the end.

2, some of the terminology has changed. The most obvious example is probably the list of characters that appear at the beginning of the novels: in the DelRey edition, Zerzaki was billed as 'the murderer' (I thought that was such a power move, to say from the beginning whodunnit, except of course, Zerzaki isn't connected to the case at all). The Vertical reprint bills him as 'Serial Killer'. Ikkun's nickname (the one Zerzaki calls him by) is changed from Damaged Goods to Defective Product while Zerzaki's nickname is changed from Human Failure to No Longer Human. (Which makes sense because it references Dazai's novel, but literariness aside Human Failure is actually a pretty accurate translation of ??? so I guess they decided to make the reference more obvious but it sounds kind of clunky as a nickname.)

Minor terms like 'homicidal monster' (referring to Zerzaki) got changed to 'serial killer' while 'murderer' (referring to the culprit) to 'culprit of homicide' in Nisio's afterword. I have no idea why they did that.

3, some lines that have been cut out of the DelRey edition have been reinstalled. For example a conversation between Ikkun and Mikoko during their first meeting that was probably cut out because it referenced something too Japanese to make sense to an English speaking audience. It's back now. Line breaks and light novel punctuation marks ('---!') have either been taken out or reinstated.

All in all, I'd say buy this version too even if you already have the DelRey version, but the 'definitive edition' is probably somewhere between the two. For that I take one star less from my rating. I have no idea why some of those changes had been made.

Still hoping Vertical keeps translating the rest of the series though! (It probably won't happen, but I don't see why they'd release Katanagatari in favour of Zaregoto. But we'll see.)

L. Petunia says

NisiOisiN entertains again. ^^ Zaregoto is definitely my favorite light novel series. There are a LOT of endless conversation scenes (I expected that after reading some of his books/seeing some of his work animated, though), but the story is always gripping, as is the exploration of humanity and the narrator's odd view on life. I still can't decide if I like the narrator or hate him (and he's given much more spotlight here than in the first book)--it's a weird relationship.

I like how the second one is so different from the first! I hope the rest of the series is translated!

Stephanie Fachiol says

Strangulation is a mystery novel that approaches human nature, as well as murder, as a case that needs to be solved.

Like its predecessor, the novel takes the time to debate the morality of murder, but its major focus is on the line between conformity and individuality. This theme is reflected in our nameless narrator, Boku ("I"), called Ikkun by his classmates, and his budding friendship(?) with the serial killer Zeruzaki Hitoshiki. Both refuse to conform to society, and both consider themselves defective products due to their lack of empathy; they see each other as two sides of the same coin, one that chose to manifest it through extreme violence, and one that chose extreme apathy. On the other hand, through the examples of college classmates such as Mikoko, Tomoe, and Muimi, the lack of will in conformity, and the absorption into society without considering one's goals and individuality, results in defective products as well. At which point do the characters become "no longer human"?

Ikkun examines three murders in the backdrop of a serial killing spree in Kyoto, though evidence suggests 'the Prowler' Hitoshiki Zeruzaki is not the culprit behind Ikkun's current puzzle. As a narrator, Ikkun is a master of maintaining tension throughout his investigation; the 'whodunnit' was strong and well-played. Furthermore, Ikkun takes the unreliable narrator archetype and raises it to a whole new level. Only by distrusting him and the suspects can the mystery be truly puzzled out before the full discussion with Aikawa in the epilogue.

Ikkun's journey to find the culprit takes him through a colorful cast of characters that are so eccentric it stretches incredulity, though their personalities are so well-tailored that even with their strangeness, they feel fully three-dimensional. Within the context of the Zaregoto universe, they fit in perfectly. Favorites Kunagisa and Aikawa make brief appearances to supplement the new cast with a little flavor of Ikkun's past.

"Everyone I meet is a genius with a bad personality. I was hoping to meet someone stupid but nice," Ikkun

laments to Detective Sasa Sasaki. Whether he's telling the truth or not is up for debate; it's the personalities of the cast that drive the mystery, and it's the personalities, good, bad, or mad, that make this novel so successful.

Teresa says

4.5 stars.

After finishing this book I can say with certainty it is actually pretty brilliant. Cover notwithstanding, the contents, other than some grammatical and sentencing errors from the translation, are pretty interesting and really hold your attention. It gave me pretty much the same vibe as The Memorandum of Kyoko Okitegami and The Perfect Insider dramas and I loved that. I thought the characters were quite interesting and the mystery really sucked me in. It was right up my alley; the Japanese mystery/ thriller genre is one of my favorites. I found out after finishing this that there are more books in this series but sadly they aren't translated into english so fingers crossed for them to be translated in the future!

PhanDuyThong says

Wow, the twist. Not only the twist for the murder, but the twist of the characters are big as well. Thanks to this book I got to know how good a con man is I(the narrator, but you know). Definitely one of the best book I've ever read so far. I hope Vertical would bring the whole series to America soon, because it is one of the best Light Novel series in Japan, and how could they forget about it.
