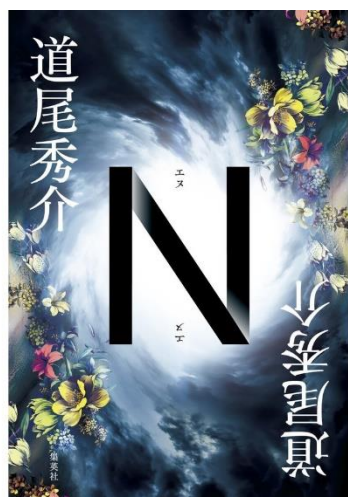


Title: N
[Enu]
Author: Shusuke Michio



-No.1 Reading meter ranking!

-63,000 copies sold!

- 720 ways of reading the mystery

6 total chapters, 720 possible stories.

Read them in the order you choose to create your own experience.

Shusuke Michio challenges the notion of a novel.

N is a collection of six mystery short stories which follow the lives of people in a small, coastal Japanese city. Incorporating multiple perspectives and timelines, the collection reveals interconnected storylines when read as a whole. A science teacher who borrows the help of a dog to learn more about her student. A high school student who tries to uncover the meaning behind a parrot's words. A retired English teacher who discovers the true murderer of a young girl. A woman whose life is saved by a mysterious intruder. A nurse who regains hope after working in Dublin. A policewoman who works with a pet detective to solve a murder. Readers can decide the order in which the stories are read, creating a unique reading experience and possibly different endings.

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Materials: Japanese manuscripts

English synopsis & Reader's report

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Reader's report by Alisa Yamasaki

The first story *The Poison without a Name and The Flower* follows Rika, a middle school science teacher, and an event from 13 years ago. Her husband Seiichi starts a pet detective business with his friend Masami, and the three visit a small island to search for a lost bloodhound. There Rika spots Kazuma, a troubled student who excels in science. Kazuma has been performing poorly in school ever since losing his mother, and has blamed her death on his father who is a doctor. Later, Rika discovers that Kazuma has been collecting poisonous plants from the island with the intent of poisoning someone, maybe even himself. Borrowing the help of the bloodhound (the owners gave it up), the three find Kazuma loitering at night. Rika stops Kazuma right before he drinks the poison, saving him from suicide. Shortly after, however, Seiichi chases the dog and is hit by a car. Masami names the dog Yoshioka after Seiichi's last name and continues the business in his memory.

The second story *The Ball that Doesn't Sink and The Bird* follows middling high school baseball player Shinya whose brother is a local baseball legend. One morning, as Shinya practices pitching, he discovers a parrot who repeats the phrase, "Can you die already?" Shinya and fisherman Nishikimo follow the parrot back home and learn that it belongs to Chinami, a depressed high school student. Shinya becomes curious about how the parrot learned the phrase and decides to investigate. He eventually discovers that Chinami had been repeating this to herself and had suicidal ideations; she released the parrot so it wouldn't be taken away after her death. Readers finally learn that Shinya's brother took his life due to cyberbullying and that his death has been motivating Shinya. At the end, Nishikimo takes the two on a boat to see crepuscular rays shine in the rare shape of a five petalled flower—a once in a lifetime sight.

The third story *The Death of the Girl Who Doesn't Smile* follows retired middle school English teacher Niima on his trip to Dublin. One day he meets 12-year old Oriana begging on the street and befriends her. He learns that she has been living with her aunt after losing her mother, and has been begging to support them both. She shows him a beautiful illustration of a butterfly that her mother made along with a special box, but Oriana refuses to open it. The following day Niima meets her on the street again, and he holds her box while she looks for a dropped coin. Niima takes the opportunity and opens the box while she isn't looking, but all he sees is a piece of tissue. When he returns to Japan, Niima makes a terrible discovery. Readers learn that Oriana had been keeping a butterfly in the box, believing it to be a reincarnation of her mother. Oriana ran outside when she saw her box empty and was killed in a car accident.

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The fourth story *The Lie of The Male Bee Who Can't Fly* follows insect researcher Chie and her memory of decades-old events. One night, when Chie is violently beaten by her boyfriend Tasaka, a man named Nishikimo suddenly emerges and attacks him. As the three struggle, Chie kills Tasaka with a knife. The two dispose of the body in the ocean and hide from the police in her apartment for weeks, eventually developing feelings for each other. Nishikimo will not explain why he was there, only saying that he planned to kill Tasaka and that she should blame him if police come. After Nishikimo disappears, Chie realizes that he was the boy who called an ambulance when she was injured as a girl. She also learns that his mother was stabbed to death by his abusive father. Chie realizes that Nishikimo had entered her home as a burglar, but decided to intervene when he witnessed her being beaten. Chie looks back on her life which was made possible by Nishikimo and hopes to meet him again someday.

The fifth story *The Glass Star that Doesn't Disappear* follows Kazuma who is now a hospice nurse working in Dublin. Kazuma works for terminal cancer patient Holly whose daughter Oriana appears in the third story. Her favorite butterfly is Holly Blue, a butterfly that she learned about from Chie. After finding out about her mother's condition, Oriana has stopped smiling which saddens Holly. Stella, Holly's sister, mentions her lucky charm—a piece of uranium sea glass she had as a child—and how bad things have happened since she lost it. Oriana decides to find a piece herself and searches the beach with Kazuma. After hours of searching, Oriana finally finds one. We learn that Kazuma had bought a piece of uranium glass in advance and hid it on the beach. Thanks to this, Holly is able to see Oriana's smile again. At the end, Kazuma flies to Japan and decides to visit his father with whom he has not spoken in years.

The final story *The Detective Who Doesn't Sleep and The Dog* follows policewoman Onoda who is trying to solve the murder of the Kizaki couple. Head detective Yaeda suspects that it was 19-year old neighbor Keisuke since he was caught in their backyard with a knife just a month before. Onoda enlists the help of pet detective Masami to find the family dog who has been missing since the night of the murder, hoping that this will lead to clues. Masami tells Onoda how he left home at the age of six because his abusive mother accused him of stealing, and how living on the streets helped him understand animals. The dog is found dead, but before Onoda can draw any conclusions, she is informed by Yaeda that Takaya, the son of the Kizakis, has been arrested. Readers finally learn that Keisuke is Onoda's son, and that he was trying to cut the dog free because Takaya was abusing it. Onoda is overwhelmed by regret when she discovers that her son was innocent and apologizes for ever doubting him.

Each story in N contains an element of mystery and a surprising ending, and as readers read on, the

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interconnected timelines produce even more intrigue. There are many details that could not be included in this report, but the strength of the novel lies in these overlapping events and recurring characters. A character who seems unlikeable in one story may appear in another one at a different time in their life, thereby challenging readers' impressions as their history is revealed. This is a very effective strategy by the author as it sustains readers' interest throughout and even motivates them to reread the book in different orders.

While the theme of death looms heavily over the stories, the collection as a whole inspires hope and kindness for one another. In all of the stories besides the third one, the characters simultaneously witness a rare weather phenomenon occur above the small island in town. Five crepuscular rays emerge from the clouds, creating the shape of a massive five petalled flower on the ocean. Characters believe this phenomenon to be a local myth until they see it for themselves. "My life might change if I can see it with my own eyes," a young Nishikimo says. Perhaps life is worth living if we can witness something so miraculous. And if we can witness something miraculous, perhaps it means that there are many more miracles to look forward to in our lives.

Author: Shusuke Michio



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Mystery and science-fiction writer Michio Tsuzuki (1929-2003) inspired Shusuke Michio's penname (and surely the protagonist's name in the current work!). The author, born in 1975, won a prize for his short fiction in 2002 before gaining particular attention with the Horror and Suspense Special Prize for his novel *Se no me* [Eyes in the Back] in 2004. *Himawari no sakanai natsu* [The Summer the Sunflowers didn't Bloom] was his breakthrough novel in 2005. Among a prolific output for which he has received numerous awards, some of his most famous novels apart from the present work are *Karasu no oya-yubi* [Crow's Thumb] (2008) and *Tsuki to kani* [Moon and Crab] (2011), which won him the Naoki Prize. None of his works is yet to be published in English

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