



## The Flowers of Evil, Vol. 1

*Shuzo Oshimi*

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## **The Flowers of Evil, Vol. 1** Shuzo Oshimi

Takao Kasuga is a bookworm. And his favorite book right now is Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil. While the young man may often be seen lost in thought as he rabidly consumes page after page, Takao is not much of a student. Actually when we are first introduced to the middle school teen, we find him sneaking some reading as he receives and F on a recent language exam.

Nakagawa is known as the class bully. When she is not receiving zeros she is usually muttering profanities to those around her. While she doesn't care for books or their readers, she does have a thing for troublemakers. Takao may not be one, but having read over his shoulder a few times, she knows he is not very innocent. If anything he is bored and aware of it.

Together, by chance, they shake up their entire rural community as Takao tries to break out of his shell in a random moment of passion and affection...not directed towards Nakamura. And contrary to Takao's predictions, the girl he was falling for, Nanako Saeki, responds by eventually accepting the bibliophile for who he is. Or at least, who she thinks he is.

And therein lies the conflict. Takao is not a hero. He is not trouble-maker, either. He is a regular teen who through equal moments of cowardice and chivalry takes a long step towards adulthood as he desperately tries to cover up a dark secret. Takao Kusuga has stolen an item precious to someone he is attracted to, and if he doesn't form a "contract" with his new best friend, she is going to tell.

## **The Flowers of Evil, Vol. 1 Details**

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Author : Shuzo Oshimi

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## From Reader Review The Flowers of Evil, Vol. 1 for online ebook

### Sean O'Hara says

When you pick up a book that takes its title from Baudelaire's poetry, you know you're in for something screwed up, but Jesus Christ.

Here's the short version. This story involves:

- 1) The main character stealing a girl's gym clothes for masturbatory purposes,
- 2) A girl blackmailing a guy over (1) and forcing him to
- 3) Go on a date with the girl he stole clothes from while,
- 4) Wearing said clothes under his normal outfit, during which time,
- 5) The blackmailer derives perverse pleasure from watching the whole situation. Oh, and,
- 6) The characters are all in, like 8th grade.

Sooooo ... yeah, weird.

Vertical's done an okay packaging this series. It's not as nice as some of their other manga, but the simple, austere cover art is fitting. I have to give the translator props -- the scanlation I read would render the foul language as, "fucker" or "asshole" with a footnote explaining that what she really said was, "shitworm," or "human-sized foreskin," while Vertical's translator just gives us the literal translations.

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### Jan Philipzig says

#### The Story of a Filthy Fucking Pervert

This review is for the entire series - spoilers ahead!

Like many young adolescents, Kasuga has lofty notions of altruistic and platonic love. He has constructed a fantasy world for himself in which he shares this noble kind of love with his popular classmate Saeki, the girl of his dreams. When, to his great surprise, an actual romantic relationship with Saeki starts to develop, Kasuga is not only thrilled but also terrified. His romantic ideals are finally put to the test, and it immediately becomes clear that love is not as pure an emotion as he had made it out to be. Greed, lust, and plain old cowardice are integral parts of it - a fact that Kasuga's favorite author, Charles Baudelaire, had pointed out all along.

Not ready to leave his rather naïve ideals behind, Kasuga initially denounces anything that interferes with them as "perverted." Gradually, however, he develops a darker concept of love, one that leads him to the mysterious, confrontational, supremely unpopular Nakamura. Unfortunately, Nakamura only seems interested in convincing the world that, as she puts it, "Kasuga's a filthy fucking pervert." Why is she so keen on denigrating poor Kasuga? Does she feel that, by "normal" people's standards, she herself is a "filthy fucking pervert" as well? Does she want to leave the "normal" world behind together with Kasuga? Is she, in her own unconventional ways, really looking for love? Or is she a much more troubled and troubling character who simply takes sadistic pleasure in torturing somebody as confused and manipulable as Kasuga?

The mystery that surrounds Nakamura's bizarre behavior quickly becomes the story's focal point, and it makes for a great hook! Once the mystery has been resolved, however, there are still five volumes to go. The

protagonists spend them... "maturing," I guess: Kasuga moves to another town, falls in love again, learns to develop more balanced and stable relationships, leaves behind the fatalistic and ultimately self-destructive attitudes of his youth. Good for him, but not for the story. The shift from manic over-the-top drama to subtle character psychology does not play to Shuzo Oshimi's strengths as a storyteller, and *Flowers of Evil* thus gradually loses its punch and vigor until it finally ends with a whimper.

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### David Schaafsma says

See Seth Hahne's more complete and great review. But I liked this a lot. Made me smile. Middle school horrors book. Kashuga is a bookworm whose favorite book is Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. One day on a whim he steals the gym clothes of a girl he likes; another girl who seems to like him observes this, blackmails him, ah, the anguish.... Baudelaire doesn't figure in too much in this one, except maybe in a mock-epic way, or maybe all the despair and anguish of the young poet are somehow equated with middle school melodrama, I don't know... But this feels real in some ways and fun squirmy in other ways. I guess the more I think of it Baudelaire focused on beauty and its changing nature, and one's changing relationship with and definitions of it, so that fits for middle school or for desire, generally. Fleeting, ephemeral experiences... hmm, maybe it fits better than I had initially thought! I recommend it; a very fast read but worth looking at.

PS: Okay, now I read Seth's more thoughtful review on the Baudelaire point and agree with him completely, it's not random, it's thoughtful, and I like the collection even more than I did....

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### Chibineko says

I admit that I picked the volume up because the cover character resembled Rei Ayanami. What can I say? She's one of my all-time favorite characters, so I'm drawn to anything that resembles her. It didn't hurt that the premise sounded amazing and the cover boasted that it'd won an award.

While this manga does have a lot to boast for itself, such as great artwork and a decent plot line, there's just something about this volume that just felt a little boring. Don't get me wrong- Oshimi does a great job of not only setting up all of the characters and building the world, but it just feels like it's lacking a little bit of punch. Stuff happens, but there's not a lot that \*happens\* to make the book really sparkle for me.

I do have to give kudos to the author as far as getting into the teenage psyche goes. He covers pretty much all of the bases, such as fear and awkwardness. There's even a huge dose of "I know better than you" thrown into the mix, as well as hints that some characters (can't specify, spoilers) might have more in common with Kusagi than he knows. I also have to say that the character of Nakamura is the gem of the book. Her strangeness and scheming seems to be both driven by a specific (and as of yet unspecified) end as well as being done just for the heck of it. It's a move that definitely strikes a realistic tone because let's face it: how many of the more wicked schemes in high school were done just because the other person was bored?

Things do pick up towards the end and there's enough that I liked to warrant my reading the next volume, but I think this will probably be one of those series that I'm just never really going to "get" like others might. I can see where the book merited the award and I can see where this will get an incredibly strong cult following here in the states, but I just can't translate that into personal excitement for the book.

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## **Jillian -always aspiring- says**

I can't recommend this manga because I found what little I read of it distasteful...but so far I think the anime version is fantastic. The rotoscope animation, the deliciously creepy music, the moody atmosphere that's been created -- everything in the anime has helped to put a spotlight on the biggest strength of the manga: the psychological studies of these deeply flawed teenagers. To anyone who was disappointed in the manga (as I was), give the anime a try since, no matter what the manga purists (or rotoscope haters) say, the anime really helps this story be told in one of the best ways it could be.

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## **Elizabeth A says**

I've said this before and I'll say it again: Adults who want to be young again must not remember how hard growing up can be.

This graphic novel series is a semi-autobiographical story about Takao Kasuga. He is in middle school, an avid reader, failing a class or two, and puberty comes knocking. Nakagawa, the class bully and all around strange girl, sees Takao do something that he is deeply ashamed of, and uses this power to make his life hell. Nanako Saeki is the beautiful and smart girl Takao has a crush on.

On the surface, this is a simple coming of age story, about a boy, a crush, a bully, and peer pressure. What I loved is the honesty with which the story is told. Like most of us, Takao is neither a hero nor a villain. He is just an average kid, who loves books, especially one by Baudelaire, and cannot find anyone in his little town who understands his passion, which makes him feel trapped and lonely. The tsunami of emotions he experiences in this first volume are those that can only be felt by the very young - the highest highs and lowest lows.

I really liked the art, and this black and white manga needs to be read back to front, and each panel reads right to left, which takes a little getting used to, but is quite fun. I'm not sure if this series is targeted at middle school kids, but this volume would certainly stir up some great conversation with kids that age. There are ten volumes in this series, and I've already got the next two in the series on hold at my library.

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## **Sam Quixote says**

Kasuga is a schoolboy obsessed with Saeki, his classmate. One day after school he spies her gym clothes at the back of the empty classroom and steals them - but bad girl Nakamura saw him and is gonna blackmail him with his dirty secret!

Shuzo Oshimi's *The Flowers of Evil* explores teen sexuality from the perspective of early pubescent kids who're just beginning to experience it. But it's also a very Japanese book in that sex is so repressed over there (have you seen their pixelated porn?! I mean, me neither...) that these kids, understandably already confused with their desires, express them in ways some might consider perverted - stealing gym clothes or blackmailing someone because they're too shy to tell them they like them.

Unfortunately there's not much else to this book. I suppose it's a worthwhile subject but the material isn't enough to fill a 200-page comic. I'm not even sure why it's called *The Flowers of Evil* besides the facts that the author is a Baudelaire fan and Kasuga reads his poetry in the story - otherwise there's no connection that

I can see here. But then, not being one for poetry, I've not read Baudelaire so maybe I don't know that he wrote a poem about horny Japanese schoolkids?

Oshimi didn't hook me with the premise and this first volume didn't wow me either - maybe teens will get something out of this? For a supposedly racy topic The Flowers of Evil is pretty dull stuff.

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### **Serdar says**

Clever and cunning little sleeper of a story about a kid who gets way in over his head with a predatory classmate.

<http://www.genjipress.com/2012/05/the...>

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### **Beatriz says**

I started reading these books after I watched the anime. The anime was good, a little different from the original series, but it made me interested since it was incomplete.

Aku no Hana is a story that goes around Kasuga Takao. He's a boy who loves reading books, particularly Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A girl at his school, Saeki Nanako, is his muse and he admires her from distance. One day, he forgets his copy of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the classroom and runs back alone to pick it up. In the classroom, he finds not only his book, but Saeki's gym uniform. On a mad impulse, he steals it. Now everyone knows that "some pervert" stole Saeki's uniform, and Kasuga is dying with shame and guilt. Furthermore, the weird, creepy, and friendless girl of the class, Nakamura Sawa, sees him taking the uniform. Instead of revealing it was him, she recognizes his kindred deviant spirit and uses her knowledge to take control of his life.

This is a very dark story, but still fascinating. It messes up your brain a little bit, but it's really worth reading.

I enjoyed reading this story so much that I've started reading other works of the same author. I recommend it to everyone who likes thrillers, mystery and drama.

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### **Seth T. says**

"These kings of the sky, clumsy, ashamed."  
—Baudelaire

The young teenage years are pretty much rough on everyone. Forget all the body weirdness—the growing boobs, getting hairy nuts, the changing voice, the blood, the acne. Forget all that awful, awkward business about having a body that's transitioning from its sensible kid form into what will eventually come to be the slightly more stable form of the adult person. And forget the fact that with your new limbs and protrusions,

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your balance is completely off and even the way you used to walk has to be relearned and reapplied because you're in a different chassis than you were, and because you haven't quite caught up, you're clumsy as a yak in an America shop. Forget all that because as traumatic as that can be and almost certainly is, it's amateur hour when stood against the wall in a police line-up with the psychological and ideological shifts that govern that same period of our lives.

Or at least that govern the lives of people who are like me. And like the principal characters of Sh?z? Oshimi's *Flowers of Evil*. I don't believe we're special either. I suspect these shifts time their approach as arm-in-arm escorts of puberty, honoured guests to the marriage of the self-consciousness and self-awareness that mark our first steps toward adulthood.

*[Self-awareness vs self-consciousness! Now fight!]*

At some point along the winding path between immaturity and maturity, the human child (with few exceptions) becomes first cognizant of themselves as unique person and then of themselves as they may be viewed by others. Often, the time that passes between "Hey wait! I am totally unique and a person in my own right and I can do and believe as I want!" and "Omigosh, probably everyone will hate me!" is pretty slim. For me, it was a near instantaneous revelation. I mean, I knew before that point that some people didn't like me, but it was always distanced from who I was inside. Up until that shift in self-awareness, that some people picked on me just seemed like bad luck—like some people got the raw end and that was just kind of a matter left to the Norns. Or something. Obviously, as I wasn't yet entirely self-aware, I wasn't thinking in these kinds of terms. But regardless, I didn't recognize a huge connection between how I was treated and who I was.

"Those damaged products of a good-for-nothing age."  
—Baudelaire

Simultaneously, many of us struggle with the recognition that the world is messed up and suddenly we have minds that will someday (maybe even tomorrow) be able to grasp some of the reasons why. We see, at least in part, the errors and hypocrisies of the older generations. We see parents who aren't doing anything to make things better, who aren't rocking the boat for change. (Because they're likely too busy paying for our food and our clothes and our schooling and our housing and our entertainment, but we're not yet aware enough to see how that sucks the soul out of even the best of us.) We see these atrocities against the idealist human spirit and we reject at least a portion of what came before us. This is why so many junior high fantasies turn toward what we on the outside perceive as darkness.<sup>(1)</sup> There's this sensed need for the razing of the inequities and absurdities of the present age so that we might, even if only accidentally, emerge with something closer to utopian.

Part of this often impotent dissatisfaction with the way the world is manifests in teens finding (or believing they find) value in things that others do not. This can take the form of pursuing what are perceived to be fringe trends or marked interest in something old and off the cultural radar. Readers tend to take the latter path and so tend to express down more interesting lines—if no more rigorous or effective. There's something deliciously elitist about quote-unquote discovering some forgotten book or author, some writer of ideas that nobody you know is familiar with. When I was younger I read a biography of Rommel, a 700-page

book of moralistic principles by Richard Baxter, and a Japanese novel by a first-time female author about a kid who killed his dad with a katana and hid the body. I felt *awesome*. I mean, what non-military-historian reads Rommel's biography? I had Arrived.

I mean, of course I was a moron. But that's part of growing up, right—the journey of learning that being elite just means that you have an unrealistic understanding of your own personal value and tastes. And just as I grew up and out of much of my small-mindedness and ridiculous sense of self-worth, so too will *Flowers of Evil's* protagonist, Takao Kasuga. At least, if Nakamura lets him live that long. In a way, though, Kasuga's relationship with Nakamura has put him on a bit of a fast track for moving toward maturity. He won't get there the normal way, but barring the cataclysmic, he'll likely get there sooner than the average bear.

"Ennui, the fruit of dismal apathy,

Becomes as large as immortality."

—Baudelaire

*Flowers of Evil* is a mix between romcom and bildungsroman (as most bildungsroman are). Kasuga finds himself struggling to adulthood on the social outskirts of acceptable junior-high society. He's still well-within the fold, careful not to step too far out of line, but his adoration of literature (especially foreign literature) sets him apart from his classmates. Behind him sits Sawa Nakamura, a girl with little regard to the manner of the world around her. She stares down teachers, calls them shit-bugs in front of the class, and delights in the possibility of what she sees as true perversion—not that amateur-hour sexual deviancy stuff, but the real deal: a twisting rejection of all that her society deems acceptable and normative. Kasuga falls under the misanthropic tutelage of Nakamura when she witnesses him nearly accidentally steal the gym clothes of Nanako Saeki, on whom he's had a monster crush for over a year. Kasuga begins capitulating to Nakamura's ludicrous demands under threat that his indiscretion will be revealed to Saeki. Buoyed by the strength he finds in the writings of Baudelaire, Kasuga follows the rabbit hole as far as he can, and soon enough Saeki herself is inevitably involved—forming a kind of insane love triangle. The whole thing is just bazonkers.

Oshimi's unwary protagonist finds satisfaction in an elitism marked especially by his love for Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. Kasuga looks out over his rural town and pities it for its lack of sophistication. Of all the places he looks, he can find no one whom he believes would have read Baudelaire.(2) He even has to travel to a distant neighbourhood to access a worthwhile bookstore that will carry the highbrow imports he revels in.

When I first approached *Flowers of Evil*, I suspected that Kasuga's infatuation with Baudelaire was incidental to the French author himself and to the specifics of the referenced work, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Oftentimes, the name-dropping of authors or exterior works fulfills the singular function of giving a character an air of pretension. And certainly Kasuga *is* pretentious. He adores *Les Fleurs du mal* primarily for how it makes him feel at odds with (and so, better than) the society in which he finds himself. But for that goal, any author obscure to a fourteen-year-old in the Japanese countryside could have worked. Kierkegaard, Pascal, Cicero, Hume, Joyce. It needn't have even been an author. Kie?lowski or Eisenstein or Malick for film. Sienkiewisc or Gauguin or Man Ray for art. If all that was needed was a name to drop, any of these would have sufficed.(3) Oshimi does, however, seem to be aiming at more than mere pretension and his use

of Baudelaire seems more nuanced.

I now speak as an expert on *Les Fleurs du mal* who had read neither it nor anything of Baudelaire until yesterday afternoon. Since then, I read the *SparkNotes* analysis as well as about five of the hundred-or-so poems included in the controversial collection. So I know what I'm talking about, clearly.

Nevertheless, reading that analysis and several poems did a lot for governing my understanding of the foundation from which Kasuga is operating at the book's start. It goes a long way toward both explaining why he often reacts the way that he does to Nakamura's and Saeki's actions and enforcing Nakamura's ideological plane as a natural place of safety for Kasuga.(4)

One of the primary themes Baudelaire plays with is the ground between what he terms Ideal and Spleen. The Ideal is basically what it sounds like, the inviolable purity of nobility and love and passion. The ideal is beautiful and honourable and, in Baudelaire's sense, fantasy. The Spleen is perhaps more easily represented by a sense of malaise. The Spleen is anger and filth and human muck. Weakness, greed, cowardice, lust, all the negative traits of the human spirit that rule us while ever preventing the Ideal from becoming reality. Baudelaire seems (so far as my expert limited reading implies) to be concerned with the tension between the two.

And as a bit of a dilettante, Kasuga seems less concerned with or even aware of that tension. He begins the book entranced by the darkness he sees swirling within it. Just reading Baudelaire's words at his desk at school feels to him subversive. Kasuga is drawn to the Ideal certainly, as evidenced by the positioning of Saeki (his crush) as his muse—wholly pure, incorruptible, sexy but without either sexual volition or sexual desire. The stark unrealism he indulges with relation to the girl seems ludicrous apart from the filter of *Les Fleurs du mal*'s influence (and maybe even with that influence). Simultaneously, Kasuga wallows in his sense of the world's "evil." He doesn't so much recognize the troubles that plague humanity as he finds the concepts of evil (including rebellion and darkness and perversion) attractive—so long as they aren't in any way tied to Saeki, his muse.

"Adorable sorceress, do you love the damned?"  
—Baudelaire

Nakamura seems a kind of bridge across the tension that Baudelaire expresses. She rejects Baudelaire and the contents of *Les Fleurs du mal* out of hand. She finds in Kasuga a good kind of clay to sculpt with, but wants to free him from his reliance upon one more of what she would deem a shit-bug—those people trapped by smallness of mind in a world that could be so much more if perversion could reign.(5) Over the course of the series, Kasuga more and more finds Nakamura to be a marriage between Ideal and Spleen. Something glorious and beyond what he or Baudelaire may have conceived. Of course, he's just a naive fourteen-year-old, so what does he know?

Of the three characters, Saeki seems the most out of her depth. She's lived in quiet desperation for a long time but doesn't understand Nakamura's ideology or Kasuga's growing infatuation for it. In a way, she's the most level-headed of the group, but that leaves her the most vulnerable.(6) She also is the one with the most

to lose if her play into these floral "evils" fails her. She's the good-looking girl at the top of the class, highly popular and destined to have a good future for all the connections her family can afford her. Kasuga on the other hand was never destined for greatness and Nakamura has, in a social sense, nothing to lose.

I don't know where Oshimi is going to take his story, but unless these characters succeed in remaking the world in a new image, they're bound to come out the other end damaged and perhaps beyond recognition. The series is still ongoing in Japan and I don't know how many volumes are intended. The arcs seem to move in threes (if the cover groupings are any indication) so the series may end with volume 9 or 12. In any case, that's plenty of time for the tone to shift dramatically in any direction. Maybe volume 7 will shoot us twenty years into a post-apocalyptic future in which Nakamura is an establishment nun for the Christian overchurch that governs all nations, Saeki is a part robot dominatrix, and Kasuga only exists as an embedded consciousness implanted in all sentient beings as part of a terrorist protocol initiated by Nakamura before her conversion. Or maybe things will continue hard-driving down a road paved on the bones of angels and we'll get to see the doom of three kids who relish the rejection of the normal so deeply that they alienate all around them. Really, anything kinda goes and I'm looking forward to seeing what happens and reading probably too much into it. I'm enthusiastic about this series even if it occasionally gives me the oogly-booglies (as in volume 5's crescendo).

There are a couple more things to discuss before I close. They just didn't fit so neatly in the stream of thoughts I had above, so I'll append them here.

Oshimi's art is kind of a chimera. In some ways it's brilliant. In others it's awkward and amateurish. I never don't like it, but it's got some rough edges. I'll talk about some of them before moving onto how awesome the art is. Easiest way is to show the big splash opener for volume 1.

Oshimi sometimes struggles with perspective and so renders his characters, like Nakamura here, with impossibly short limbs or too-large heads. If you're a fast reader, you can easily blow by these without concern, but those of us who like to luxuriate in an artist's choices might be stopped cold here and there while trying to understand what's going on and whether the figures are really disfigured. And here's a close-up on Kasuga's ears from the same page:

I don't know if Oshimi's own ears feature extreme protrusion of the antihelix, but he does this a lot with his characters as if it were normal. Every time a new character appeared with such aggressive antihelices, I was stopped cold. It's not so much that I don't believe a bunch of unrelated people *could* have ears like that—more just that I become deeply curious as to the motive behind the artistic choice.

Okay, so that's it for my complaints about Oshimi's illustrations. His choices otherwise all work spectacularly. Oshimi does a solid job conveying a breadth of emotions from boredom to suspicion to fear to anger to madness to anguish to cold criminal intent. Part of the reason I continued after the not-super-impressive first volume was Oshimi's ability to convey characters with depth and breadth. Half the story is told in words, but the better half perhaps is told in looks and body language. Oshimi, for the most part, nails this. Nakamura gives looks that exult in her moral superiority. We see Kasuga's soul die a little bit and resurrect as a new species of spirit. Saeki, when she is coy but clued in, looks exactly that.

Incidentally, with the importance of facial expression to the work, Oshimi makes an important design decision with regard to Nakamura. Nearly constantly wearing glasses could have easily sabotaged her entire character's visual strength, as glasses very neatly hide or obscure the eyes. And because the eyes play such an important role in Oshimi's manner of conveying expression, a Nakamura with diminished access to that method of facial storytelling would have been disastrous. Instead, Oshimi hides portions of the glasses that

might interfere with Nakamura's expression. Often this will be the top rims of her frames, but sometimes he'll abolish other bits of the glasses' structure—as in this example in which Nakamura looks through one of the glasses' arms so that she can look from profile and the reader still knows exactly what she's expressing.

"The lady's maids, to whom every prince is handsome,

No longer can find gowns shameless enough

To wring a smile from this young skeleton. "

—Baudelaire

Oshimi also uses art to heighten the sexual tension of the book and thereby includes and indicts, pressing the reader to share Kasuga's perspective. It's not fan service, meant to titillate the low-class kind of minor perverts that Nakamura dismisses with so much disgust. This is an entirely different kind of thing and, while it may be common, I hadn't personally seen the technique used before. Oshimi uses aspect-to-aspect panel transitions to paint the scene of interpersonal space in a setting. Very, very often, the reader will encounter a couple talking head panels followed by a panel featuring only Nakamura's bust or maybe the hem of Saeki's skirt. These are not generally remotely lurid—Nakamura's bust, for instance, usually features no cleavage and is almost formless in terms of detail—and seems present in order to convey Kasuga's awareness of sexual characteristics more than anything. Here's a two-page example in which Kasuga is having a conversation with Saeki on her sickbed while she is dressed in pajamas.

The presence of the panel featuring Saeki's crotch doesn't seem in place to spur the fantasies of *Flowers of Evil's* readership but instead to prompt us to empathize with the turmoil Kasuga is experiencing and give us a clue as to its —————....

***[Review exceeds Goodreads' character limit. To continue reading the review from which this was excerpted, refer to Good Ok Bad, Home of the 3 Star Review]***

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## Maya says

The Flowers of Evil is a story about weirdness.

The author wants us to ponder on the definition of weirdness. Why are certain behaviors considered weird? And aren't we all some kind of weird, in a certain way, to a certain degree?

So, if you want to see some weird characters, this is the book to go for. The two main characters are most

definitely weird. Why? For me, it qualifies as weird to force a guy to wear the (used) gym clothes of the girl he likes. It is weird for the guy to steal these clothes in the first place and even more to sniff them. It is weird for a guy to lie drooling on the floor with a completely out of it expression, because the girl he likes was friendly to him.

Main character Takao is also very awkward. He's so extremely shy, which is realistic, but a bit tiring to look at. Nakamura on the other hand is not only weird, but extremely manipulative, abusive and might turn into a downright psychopath.

I guess Nakamura's character is supposed to be charming or at least intriguing, plus she's a possible love interest for the main character. If she works for you, the series will probably work a lot better in general. I wanted to slap her and tell her to shut up most of the time.

The art is so-so. It's not bad, but somehow feels flat (three-dimensionally speaking). At times the characters look very small, with too short legs and arms.

I couldn't warm up to the characters at all and even more importantly, I'm really not sure whether the author will reach and sufficiently analyze the psychological depths he is trying to address here. For now I get the impressions that he is drawing something weird just for the sake of it. Which is fine, if that's your genre.

I can't recommend this series to just anyone. If you're interested in "weirdness" and if you like characters like Yuno from Future Diary, Flowers of Evil is worth a try. For me, it's too much.

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### Vasil Kolev says

I've read the manga until the middle of volume 8 (still not fully published), and I'll keep on, but here's the review of the rest:

It's somewhat insane. And weird. And at some moments very dramatic, but it somehow manages to fit and not look stupid. A great read, but would be hard for most people.

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### Spira-Virgo says

**Manga:** The Flowers of Evil Vol. 1 (The Flowers of Evil 1#) by Shuzo Oshimi.

**Genre:** Coming of Age, Drama, Slice of Life, Seinen, Young-Adult, Horror, Psychological.

**Age:** Young-Adult, Mature, defiantly not for your kiddies.

**Pages:** 208 pages.

**Format:** Kindle.

**Publication:** December 8th 2015 by Kodansha

**Final Rating:** 3.5/5

*"This heavy burden to uplift,  
O Sisyphus, thy pluck is required!  
And even though the heart aspired,  
Art is long and Time is swift.*

*Afar from sepulchres renowned,  
To a graveyard, quite apart,  
Like a broken drum, my heart,  
Beats the funeral marches' sound.*

*Many a buried jewel sleeps  
In the long-forgotten deeps,  
Far from mattock and from sound;*

*Many a flower wafts aloft  
Its perfumes, like a secret soft,  
Within the solitudes, profound." - Charles Baudelaire, Flowers of Evil, Ill Luck.*

You know, some mangas can only be truly appreciated once you encounter it on the big screen. In this case, I didn't like the **Flowers of Evil** Anime only because of the use of rotoscoping. If you don't know what rotoscoping is, it's basically an animation by using frame by frame work which a lot of creators use in life-actions to animations films. So watching that adaptation was both weird and just... odd. I loved the story, the characters seems interesting but then when I finished it, I just wanted to understand. Understand why everyone I knew hated that thing, telling me constantly, '*drop it! it's not like the manga. READ THE MANGA!*'

And finally, I did it. I decided why not read the entire manga? I already did once, so why not again, since I am feeling nostalgic at the moment. Boy, did I forgot how whacky this series started... I actually kinda scared to go beyond this volume since I remembered how off putting and bizarre it was the first time I saw and read it. I suppose like time that drifts and pass so is my view on things. Which when I reread stuff gives me a whole new perspective on the subject at hands.

Oh, by the way before I start my ranting, I **highly** recommend that if some of you folks are sensitive to certain "*subjects*" should not read this. It can be... *unpleasant* sometimes.

### **STORY AND WORLD BUILDING:**

The story starts simply. **Takao Kasuga** is a timid regular boy with no particular interest besides reading. He's life goes on with no care in the world, the only thing on his mind it's books. He barely give attention to his studies nor his friends, nothing matter. Well, that is except a certain individual that caught his eyes. The class favorite and most loveable person, **Nanako Saeki**. He immortalized her, desiring her but he doesn't have the courage to confess his feelings to her. Which truly is sad...

Days passes on and Takao by accident forget to take his recent read with him home. He straight goes back to the school hoping to find at his desk. He finally finds his book only for his mind to get distracted by a a very strange bag. On this day, Takao's easygoing life are going to become a massive pain in his back.

To tell the truth, when I first saw the anime and how the story was presented like many I thought this was going to be a school comedy. But *oh boy*, was I wrong. In fact, this story is nothing like that. There's nothing funny about it. The Flowers of Evil is a story introducing us to a boy who gets in the wrong place in the wrong time, and then it leads to certain situations that god knows why he letting this happening.

You will either abandon this story or be frighten or disgust by it since it can be sometimes through the story come offs as unsettling. But it does fit with what this story is about. A teenager growing up in a world and

basically meets somebody that will change and shatter his world. Whatever it is for the worst or bad is up to him...

Although even though this story is good, this story has have certain problems. Like the characters motivations or the fact that nobody besides our protagonist or Nakamura doing anything relevant. Maybe in the next volume things will changed for the better!

On another note, like the title of the manga there is the book that inspired it. **Flowers of Evil** is a *Charles Baudelaire* poem collection he wrote about his painful life and struggles. You can pretty much see by reading the poems of Sir Baudelaire that **Shuzo Oshimi** has took several inspirations from the poems which we will later see in other volumes. I love it. It gives you this uncertain desire to know more about the inspiration that Shuzo Oshimi used for his work and how Baudelaire's book has whatever relevance on the plot or the characters.

## CHARACTERS:

*"I don't know if 'good' is the right word. I just... Books changed my world. I guess not everybody would understand."*

Takao Kasuga is basically a generic shy person who has no charisma or special qualities except he surround himself with books nobody heard about. He thinks he is superior in a way comparing to other adolescence crowd. He has a huge crush on Nanako and let me just say at first I thought it was a stupid hormone teenager silly fantasy. I am sure everyone had those, but let's say it takes it to a whole new level.

The guy is so head over heels on Nanako he made her the freaking holy grail in his eyesight. Doing even the slightest thing that might be "*sinful*" will never be right in her book. And when he finds her gym clothes beg things just get worse. At first we see how it breaks him, he wants to come clean and return the clothes but the situation gets out of hand thanks to not only his classmates but Nakamura who now basically has complete control over him.

Takao start as a good boring character struggling with the guilty, trying to atone for his sins but eventually is starting *the evil* Nakamura *lulls* him in her song. I won't explain what happens much next, but if you really want to know... Well, let's say she is making him, (view spoiler) Yeah. You heard me right. Remember what I said before? **DON'T READ IF YOU ARE NOT MATURE ENOUGH**. It actually kinda new and interesting where his new development will take him.

*"I'll let it go, Kasuga. I won't tell anyone. In return you'll make a contract with me."*

Sawa Nakamura is an outsider not having a care in the world to anybody nor to her academic life. She is keeping to herself until Takao does what he does and Nakamura witness it all and from here things gets complicated. Nakamura wants Takao to make a contract with her, to obey her commands, to tell her all his darkest most vilest thoughts and last but not least forcing him to unimaginable situations.

She is clearly sadistic or in her mind helpful to Takao. Trying to free him, to unshackle his perverted thoughts and rendered him into something he clearly isn't. I have no idea why she does it or what her intentions are, but I really am interest how things will develop later onw with those two.

*"You were really cool, Kasuga."*

Nanako Saeki is the Force Love Interest aka the FRY. She is only here to served as Takao supposed love interest and his desires but I actually sees something else to her. I don't know why, but the way she unlike her classmates who alienated Nakamura or treats Takao differently she is actually reacts better then them. In a way I think she was created as the foil to Nakamura's evil, serving as Takao's light. If he can continue living with her on the light or in the dark is up to him. I do hope she will step up and take a lead and realize Takao is not really as cool as she thought he was.

Of course there's other minor characters like Takako's parents that don't do much but seems interesting to explore about but despite that, the character serve so little to the plot itself except the main trio. If you thinking they might have any purpose in the plot, I am sorry but I cannot be sure, maybe they will maybe they will not and in all honestly I don't care at all about their opinions. I only care to read more about Takao's struggle, Nakamura cunning charisma and Nanako involvement in the story.

#### WRITING & ARTWORK:

Shuzo Oshimi has a very interesting story to tell. Of course I feel that perhaps instead of a manga he might would have portrait better as a light novel, then we could have got better characterization in Takao to maybe in Nakamura and hack maybe even Nanako. It feels like a story that should have multiple POVs between the main trio and how each interact and grow in this world. However, despite that Mr Oshimi do get the pacing right with the story itself helping to flesh out the characters and the story moves perfectly regardless of my mixed feelings on it.

His artwork on the other hand is magnificent. It blends perfectly into the story, giving a innocent look yet grown up on the characters and it's story presentation, plus I love the flower of evil keeping popping out or Nakamura faces stares. They are the highlight of this book in my mind. Of course my problem lies in the cover art, it just so bland, but yet it does gives the wrong deception that this book is not the cutely comedic shonen manga you think you'd be reading. I guess Sometimes you better be careful what you wish for. Isn't it right, Takao? ;)

#### OVERROLL:

To be fair, I love this manga but i thought the beginning was a bit... slow. The pacing suppose to be slow which fits the story narration and how real life is like, things happening slowly but gradually growing into something truly intimidating that you do not know how to handle. The characters has potential to grow but the writing kinda scrutinized it with only Takao the only one showing us what's happening to him which leaves us in the dark about Nakamura's intentions or Nanako's feeling. But, there's so many stuff that makes me question why and how this is happening. I guess that's part of cultural differences, society, the school and basically what Japan is like. I do strongly suggest that if you do not like this type of regular fiction stories, then you won't be able to like this manga. Be it the creepy tone or the characters you better try to give it a fair trial by reading the first 5 volumes. If not I guess it just not your thing. I on the opposite hand cannot wait to see what Nakamura is planning next for Takao~

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**Clair says**

So, a few days ago I started watching the Flowers of Evil anime on a whim, and decided to check out the manga.

First things first, I don't particularly care for the massive outcry there has been online for the anime taking on a jerky rotoscoping style of animation. In fact, if you go on Amazon Japan, there's been a whole deluge of people giving the anime one star ratings and reviews. This may not be true of every Japanese review on Amazon, but the majority seem to really have taken umbrage with the change in art style, even if the creator said they approved of it.

I see both sides of the argument. I see that the series should be all cutesy - the way the manga is - in order to really carry over the creepiness in the story. Giving it a slightly more realistic, rotoscoped look is just being too overt with the creepy aspect. On the other hand, if it had retained its manga style, people may not be giving it the time of day, or even discussing it so much.

Whatever the case, I like both styles and don't really see the need for the huge debate.

Anyway, back onto the manga.

Flowers of Evil is about Takao Kasuga, a lonely teenager who devours classical literature and has a sense of self-importance about him because of course, nobody else in his class could ever understand these masterworks because they're so close-minded. Or, you know, just not particularly interested in Baudelaire or Philip K. Dick. I know I wasn't at that age.

After school one day, Takao steals the gym uniform of his crush Saeki, in a fit of lust. The creepy girl in class, Sawa Nakamura, saw him do it, and threatens to expose his secret unless he becomes her friend and she lets him 'peel away the layers and show him what a rotten fucking pervert he is.' Charming. Takao, being the weak-willed sort, accepts this contract.

As Saeki is the most popular girl in the class, when news gets out that her gym uniform was stolen, the class instantly start whispering about what sort of pervert would do such a thing. Rather than do the logical thing, of oh, Kasuga going to Saeki in private on the same day and telling her he picked up her uniform instead of his by complete accident, he just stays quiet, and so the rumour mill goes into overdrive. Cripes, dude, just tell her! That way you don't have to have Nakamura breathing down your neck or screaming in your face or threatening you.

At first, Nakamura really interested me. I actually had this theory about her not actually being real, to begin with. Well, she was real - she was just the oddball sitting behind Kasuga in class, and not really much of a threat besides her propensity to swear at teachers and those around her. Nakamura forcing Kasuga to do all this blackmail was just his way of excusing himself for say, wearing Saeki's gym uniform underneath his clothes on his first date with her. I don't subscribe to that theory any more, but it could have been interesting if that were the case.

I don't quite get Kasuga, to be honest. He has a group of friends, yet some of the kids in his class are really mean to him. There's this one part where one of Saeki's friends discovers that her lunch money has been taken out of her locker, and the class instantly turns on Nakamura without any proof. (Haha, what next - turn it into a classroom trial and give little Phoenix Wright his first taste of law being used to help the defence out of sticky situations?) Kasuga basically speaks up and says that there's no evidence to convict Nakamura, so everyone should stop picking on her. At first some of his classmates tell him to shut up and sit in the corner with his book, but then it turns into this whole: "Nakamura and Kasuga, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" bullcrap. And Kasuga just never speaks up! Dude, they're accusing you really harshly, just say something! The same thing you should have said to Saeki to get yourself out of this mess in the first place! It reminds me of Yahtzee's review of the game Catherine: 'If the dude could take five seconds to just explain things without

stammering out more lies whilst sweating like James Murdoch at a government hearing, then he could probably sort everything out!' Granted, Kasuga doesn't lie (much), but he does keep so quiet that the rumours just keep on accumulating until he's in a somewhat similar position to Vincent Brooks.

That being said, the manga is stupidly addictive. Manga that contains high stakes emotional drama does tend to be addictive (see Keiko Suenobu's LIFE), and Flowers of Evil did a very good job in keeping this member of its audience captive. I burned through volumes 1-4 over the course of two nights before realising it was getting worse with every volume.

Worse as in ratings, not worse as in drama.

Yes, unfortunately, the drama just crashes into a brick wall over the next few volumes. While I won't spoil it here, it's just shilled out more and more to the point of eye-rolling whenever Nakamura makes Kasuga do something, or Kasuga has to go out of his comfort zone, or... argh. Such a shame, because I was really loath to go from a three star to a two star.

I wanted to love this manga, but Kasuga is just completely whiny and irksome, and with all the drama that's pushed on him, it just becomes over the top after a while.

He constantly moans that nobody understands him or his love of books, but come on, man. That's no way to live your life. I get that this rural isolation is a key thing in the series - Kasuga feels like nobody understands him, like he's on an alien planet where people speak completely unintelligible nonsense, and so does Nakamura. Well... Just move to the city when you get to university. That's all you have to do! It might be a far-off dream, but just work hard and you'll be there before you know it. I'm sure there's someone in a student union bar in Tokyo or Osaka who understands the intrinsic meaning behind Baudelaire.

I also was pretty annoyed with Kasuga's dad just hand-waving everything away. I mean, Kasuga gets into a lot of trouble later in the series and yet his dad just goes: "Oh, don't worry, he's just going through puberty," or "He's a teenage boy, we should let him have some free rein," etc.

While I do quite like this manga and found it fascinating to delve into, the drama really does become overbearing after a while. Nakamura's character schtick really wears off after a while. "Oh, look, she's got Kasuga alone. Oh, oh, she's going to swear at him and burst out a crazy expression! Yep, that's it, there she goes!" Kasuga, unfortunately, just isn't a character you want to support. He's the kind of person you want to kick up the backside and tell him to do something. This kind of character can be done well - see Shinji from Evangelion - but here it's just tedious.

So, like I said before, Flowers of Evil volume 1 gets a 3 star rating from me. The characters aren't great, the drama just snowballs until you can't really bring yourself to care about it any more... and yet it is incredibly addictive, and there are some parts where it's well-written and gets across its message perfectly with clever motifs and symbols. It's just a shame all the good stuff is overshadowed by the crappy drama angle.

(This review is available on my blog: <http://book-wyrm.blogspot.co.uk/2013/...>)

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## **James DeSantis says**

This was a really weird book. However, it's from Japan, so I expect no less.

A nerdy dude who reads a lot of books and hangs out with other losers in school has a huge crush on a girl.

One day after school he goes back to grab his book and finds her gym bag on the floor. He decides to steal it and take it home because, well it has her school uniform that she wore that day at gym, and he'd like to do some nasty things (Boy lingo for jerking off). However, the news comes out that her stuff is stolen and someone must be a huge perv! Then we find out the girl who sits behind the boy knows he stole it and becomes to play with him. Creating a "contract" that he must do whatever she says or she's going to tell on him. However, she might be more of a perv than him.

Good: It's goofy and funny and weird and it all somehow is interesting. The main girl who is toying with the main character (sorry names are slipping me) is a real weirdo and kind of hot in the way she uses him to get what she wants. Also the art is pretty solid as well.

Bad: The dialog can sometimes be confusing. Like the way they talk, I'm like, who the fuck talks like that? Also the main character is a giant pussy, and that seems to be the general rule of character for 50% of manga and it's annoying but yeah.

Overall this was fun, weird, and I want to read more. So it sums up most Manga for me haha. A 3 out of 5.

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