

## **A READER'S GUIDE TO**

### **NAN-CORE**

**By Mahokaru Numata**

**translated by Jonathan Lloyd-Davies**

### **Discussion Questions**

1. At the beginning of the story, Ryosuke comes to the house after his mother has died. He writes, "I stepped inside and noticed that the house felt deserted, as though long since abandoned. I had come by a number of times when my parents had both been away, but it had never felt this vacant before. The air inside was completely transformed." How does this observation foreshadow Ryosuke's changing feelings about his family later in the book?
2. Ryosuke talks about coming home after a long stay in the hospital as a child, and thinking that his mother has been replaced by someone else. Do you have any early childhood memories that were forgotten until something triggered them many years later?
3. Guilt – or lack of guilt -- is a recurrent theme in the story. Ryosuke says, "The discomfort I felt towards my mother came to be replaced by guilt for still feeling that way. And you don't need much effort to forget guilt, especially when you're a child." In what other ways, and for which other characters, does guilt play a key role?
4. When the writer of the notebooks overhears the doctor say, "Your child doesn't have ... Nan-Core," what was he really saying? And what do you think a lack of Nan-Core actually means?
5. After the death of the first victim, the writer says that she is impatient for the next sacrificial offering to appear. To what or to whom is she making a sacrifice, and for what purpose?
6. Do you think the writer's motives for killing were the same for each of her victims, or do you think they differed depending on her relationship with

each? For instance was the urge to kill the same for Mitsuko as for the subsection chief from her old company?

7. What does the writer see in Mitsuko that leads her to form a bond with her?
8. The theme that everyone has dark secrets runs throughout the book. In addition to the writer, which other characters are keeping secrets, and how do their attempts to keep them hidden impact on Ryosuke's life?
9. Did you see anything in Ms. Hosoya's behavior toward Ryosuke to indicate that her feelings were more than those of a loyal employee for her boss? Are there any clues earlier in the story that hint at Ms. Hosoya's identity?
10. Ryosuke speculates that Ms. Hosoya seems very fond of Chie because she had a daughter and she was projecting her feelings for her own child onto the other young woman. What do you make of Ms. Hosoya's relationship with Chie?
11. How do you think Ryosuke feels when he learns that "Mom" told his brother Yohei about his early childhood and her own youth, and yet never shared these kinds of stories with Ryosuke?
12. Why do you think the writer is drawn to the man she eventually marries? What was different about him and why didn't she kill him?
13. As Ryosuke continues to read, he realizes that he's started to overlap the experiences of the people in the notebooks with his own relationship with Chie. Why do you think this was happening?
14. When Ryosuke finally confronts his father about the notebooks, why do you think his father gives in so quickly to Ryosuke's request for the last book?
15. Emiko had agonized over the decision to take her sister's place. What do you believe was her true motive in finally agreeing to the plan?

16. Is Ryosuke's reaction to hearing about Chie's violent husband the normal anger of someone who thinks a loved one is threatened? Or is there something deeper and darker going on?
17. The idea of predestination is mentioned a number of times in the story. Do you think the characters really believe that things are predestined, or is it just an excuse to abdicate responsibility for their actions?
18. Ryosuke says that he'd wanted to kill Shiomi "to bring closure to my feelings towards my mother." What do you think he means? And how are his actions after discovering the body a part of this need?
19. Yohei describes what Misako's family did not as an act of hate but "a chronicle of family love." Do you agree with this assessment?
20. Was Emiko's death an accident? If not, why do you think she chose to end her life?
21. There are two protagonists in the story, one essentially "good" and one essentially "evil." On page 200, Ryosuke says, "Maybe it wasn't just me. Maybe everyone has a killer lying dormant within, waiting for the conditions necessary to rouse up and fall into place." Do you agree with this, as well as the opposite – that everyone has some good in them as well?
22. What do you think the author of *Nan-Core* wants to convey to the reader about the possibility of redemption? What elements in the story support this?