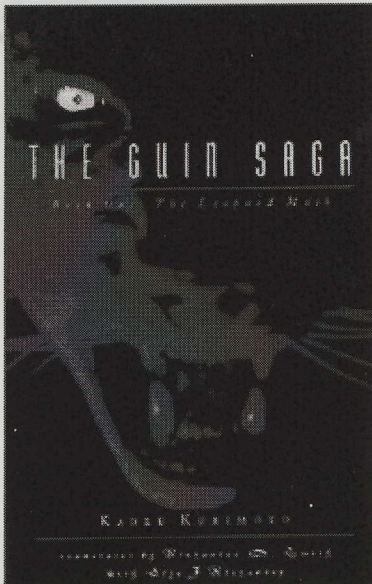


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The Guin Saga Book One The Leopard Mask by Kaoru Kurimoto,
Alexander O. Smith (Translator), Elye J. Alexander (Translator)

Vertical HCVR: ISBN 1932234519 PubDate: 06/01/03

Review by Lorraine Marsh

231 pgs. List price \$23

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With 85 installments and 25 million copies sold in Japan, *The Guin Saga* can justly claim to be one of the world's most popular fantasy sagas. Now, with the release of an English edition of the first book in the series, we can join the ranks of loyal readers. Envisioned as a 100 installment series, it is the story of a creature that wakes in the forest with a man's body and a leopard's head, and no memory of who or what he is.

Despite the incredible amounts of blood and slaughter, despite the lack of resolution to the story (which will go on for another ninety nine books) this is great reading. To go along on the story's trail from forest to castle keep is to take a vivid journey full of wonderful sights and heart stopping surprises.

It is all told in splendid, speeding detail.

The beautiful twins Remus and Rinda are all that remain of their regal family. Their royal holdings taken by the army of Mongaul, they have fled into the wild forest "between the domains of men and the darker regions where dark things dwelled." They survive their first night by hiding in a savage growth of thorn plants, but they know that they won't last much longer, trapped between the terrors of the wild and the greater terrors of their pursuers.

Fortunately, fate has its eye on them and encounter a leopard headed man, or at least a man wearing a leopard mask. Dying of thirst because he cannot drink through his leopard mask, and unable to remember who he is or how he came to be trapped in the mask, he rouses himself to fight for the twins when a squad of Black Knights comes upon them. Killing the leader of the knights, he uses slain kings body as a whip to strike down the others. Exhausted and dying of thirst, he collapses, but Rinda realizes his plight and makes a straw that he can use to suck through the mask.

That night they are saved from the forest horrors by a terrible fire. The next morning they are captured by another squad of the Black Knights, and so, they are brought to the castle of a terrible inhuman lord where the Leopard man is forced to fight a fierce beast against impossible odds. What comes next? Will the leopard warrior prevail, or will this be a very short saga?

Yes, this is very much like a comic, or serial, with new perils in each scene and impossible last minute escapes lurking around every corner. And that gives this story its compelling story book quality, that and the captivating characters: Guin, a warrior in a mask who has forgotten who he is, but not where duty lies. Remus, a young prince in hiding from the people who have taken everything from him and his family, and Rena, a princess who will grow into a beautiful (but opinionated) woman...and one who has the gift of prophecy.

The end of this book, or episode, leaves us in the best tradition of such things, holding our breaths and literally hanging in mid air, wondering what happens next. Perhaps readers should be cautioned that once you start this journey, it will be nearly impossible to leave it unfinished.

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