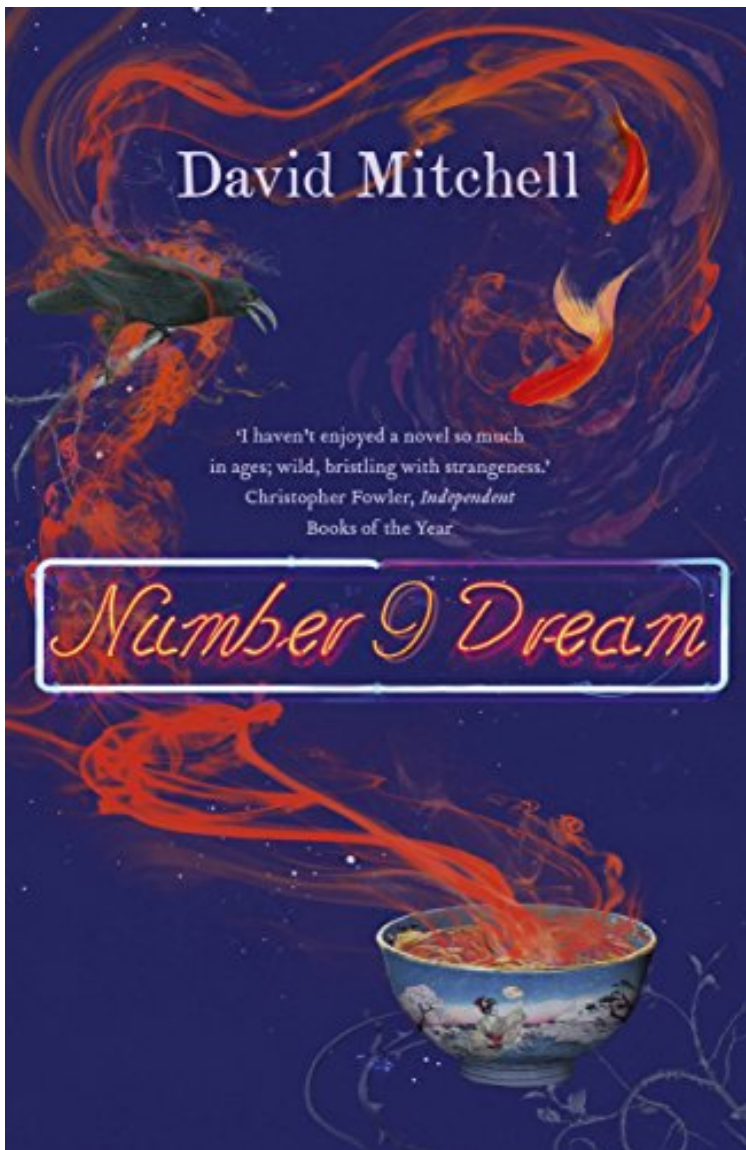


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number9dream (English Edition)



Par David Mitchell

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurShortlisted for the Booker Prize 2001The second novel from the critically-acclaimed author of GHOSTWRITTEN and CLOUD ATLAS.As Eiji Miyake's twentieth birthday nears, he arrives in Tokyo with a mission - to locate the father he has never met. So begins a search that takes him into the seething city's underworld, its lost property offices and video arcades, and on a journey that zigzags from reality to the realm of dreams. But until Eiji has fallen in love and exorcised his childhood demons, the belonging he craves will remain, tantalizingly, just beyond his grasp..comDavid Mitchell's second novel, Number9Dream, tells the story of Eiji Miyake, a young man negotiating a hypermodern and dangerous Tokyo to meet for the first time his secretive and powerful father. Nave and fresh from the Japanese

countryside, Eiji encounters every obstacle imaginable in his quest, from his father's--and in-laws'--reluctance for the encounter to occur (Eiji is the bastard son) to fiery entanglements with yakuza (the Japanese mafia) to the overwhelming size and anonymity of Tokyo itself. The novel is cartoonish in that Eiji has a vivid and violent imagination that fills the book with daydreams. When not chain-smoking, forlorn Eiji wanders the city following vague or cryptic leads that invariably dead-end or land him back among yakuza.

Mitchell (author of the critically acclaimed *Ghostwritten*) has a smart, eclectic writing style that seems foreign, and the novel is well paced, but the yakuza encounters are too cinematic, complete with unusual torture and pyrotechnics. Moreover, in addition to Eiji's daydreams, the last half of the book contains excerpts from the diaries of his great uncle's World War II naval heroics and bizarre short stories that Eiji reads while hiding--the latter of which make for tedious reading. *Number9Dream* is crafted from too many disparate components; it does not seem to be a full expression, but an overly crowded one. Readers will sympathize with Eiji and his search, but in the end will wonder what effect, if any, all the extraneous forces had on him. The book provides many fun moments, but ultimately it doesn't really add up to the sum of its parts. --Michael Ferch

ExtraitonePanOpticon "We are both busy people, so let's cut the small talk. You already know my name, or at least you knew it, once upon a time. Eiji Miyake. Yes, Ms. Kato, that Eiji Miyake. Why am I here in Tokyo? Think about it. I am here to find out who my father is. And why you, Ms. Kato? You know his name and you know his address. I never threaten anyone. But I am telling you that you are going to give me the information I want. Right now." Or something like that. A galaxy of cream unribbons in my coffee cup, and the background chatter pulls into focus. My very first morning in Tokyo, and already I am getting ahead of myself. Jupiter Cafe sloshes with lunch-hour laughter, Friday plottings, clinking saucers. Drones bark into cell phones, she-drones hitch up sagging voices to sound more feminine.

Steam bears coffee, seafood rolls, detergent. I have a fine across-the-street view of PanOpticon's main entrance. Quite a sight, this zirconium gothic skyscraper. Its upper floors are hidden by cloud, and so is the real Akiko Kato. City weather is a mystery. Under its tight lid, Tokyo swelters at 34C in 86 percent humidity--a big panasonic display says so. Tokyo is too close up to see, sometimes. There are no distances and everything is above your head--dentists, kindergartens, dance studios. Even the roads and walkways are up on murky stilts. An evil-twin Venice with all the water drained away. Reflected airplanes climb over mirrored buildings. I always thought Kagoshima was huge, but you could lose it down a single side alley in Shinjuku. I light a cigarette--I am smoking Kools today, the brand chosen by a biker with hair dyed blackcurrant in the line ahead of me--and watch the traffic and passersby on the intersection between Omekaido Avenue and Kita Street. City office drones, lip-pierced hairdressers, midday drunks. Nobody is standing still. Rivers, snowstorms, traffic, bytes, generations, a thousand faces per minute. Back on Yakushima you might get a thousand minutes per face. Crowds make me thoughtful. All these people have boxes of memories labeled "Father," "Dad," "Pa." Whatever. Photogenic pix, shots in poor light, scary figures, tender poses, fuzzy angles, scratched negatives--it makes no difference. Unlike me, they know who it was who ushered them into the world. Crowds make me too thoughtful. Ms. Kato! Come down to Jupiter Cafe! It would be so much simpler. You drop by for a seafood roll and a coffee; I recognize you instantly, of course, introduce myself, admit coyly that I was hoping to bump into you here; we discuss the matter at hand--we are two grown-ups now--and you will see that natural justice is on my side. I sigh aloud, and sense my neighbor hide him-or-herself deeper behind his-or-her barrier of newspaper. How do you smuggle daydreams into reality? My careful plan seems far-fetched. A building as vast as PanOpticon surely has many other exits. It must have its own restaurants, to spare its employees the hassle of descending to ground level. Who says you even eat lunch, Ms. Kato? Maybe your slaves bring you a human heart to tide you over until supertime. I entomb my Kool in the innards of its ancestors and resolve to end my stakeout when I finish this coffee. Hear that, Akiko Kato? I am coming in to get you. Three waitresses staff Jupiter Cafe this lunchtime. Waitress One--the boss--is a brittle imperial dowager who poisoned her husband. Waitress Two, a corn-on-the-cob face with a braying donkey voice, is Waitress One thirty years ago. Waitress Three is turned away right now, but her hair is up and I can see she has the most perfect neck on Earth. I mean it. A syndicate of love poets could not describe how smooth and curved this neck is. Soft as a peeled egg. Dowager is telling Donkey--and half Jupiter Cafe by default--about her hairdresser's latest failed marriage.

"When his wives don't measure up to his fantasies, that's when he tosses them overboard." She has an industrial-diamond voice. The waitress with the perfect neck is serving a life sentence at the sink with a scrubber and sponge in lieu of a ball and chain. The atmosphere is hostile in here. Are Dowager and Donkey cold-shouldering her, or is she cold-shouldering them? Hot fog is now down to the ninth story of PanOpticon.

I decide to calculate the number of days I have lived. It comes to 7,286. I add four leap years. The clock says 12:51. Suddenly most of the drones in the cafe get to their feet and flock away. Are they afraid that if one o'clock finds them anywhere except their fluorescent-lit cubicles, their companies will have an ideal excuse to Restructure them? I watch lots of them enter PanOpticon, and toy with the idea of coming back tomorrow and stealing an ID tag. No. Simple is good. I strike PanOpticon today. At the stroke of one o'clock. My coffee cup stands empty in its moat of slops. I admit I am nervous. Nervous is cool. A recruitment officer for the Self-Defense Forces came to my high school--my old high school, I should say--and said that no worthwhile fighting unit wants members who are immune to fear. In combat, soldiers who are blind and brave inevitably get their platoon wiped out. An effective soldier controls his fear, and uses it to sharpen his senses. It sounded so easy. Another coffee, Eiji? No, thanks, Eiji, but I will smoke one final Kool. To sharpen my senses. I catch the clock changing from 13:31 to 13:32. Yeah, I know, my deadline died. My ashtray brimmeth over. I shake my box of Kools. Only two left. The fog is down to the sixth story. I imagine Akiko Kato gazing through her air-conned executive-office-suite window--it is high, high up, above the fog even, maybe. The sunshine is stellar up there. Can she sense me, as I sense her? Did she wake up this morning knowing that today is one of those life-altering days? One final, final, final cigarette before "nervous" becomes "spineless." The only other customer in Jupiter Cafe who has stayed as long as me is an old man. He is plugged into a vidboy. His fingers twitch as he fires plasma bolts into the digital distance. He is identical to the ink-brush portrait of Lao Tzu in my classics textbook. I mean it. Bald, nutty, bearded. Other customers arrive, order, pay, drink, eat, use the bathroom, and go. Decades' worth every quarter-hour. Only Lao Tzu and I endure. The waitresses must be thinking my girlfriend has stood me up. Or that I am a psycho on the prowl for a female to stalk. A Muzak version of "Imagine" comes on and John Lennon wakes up in his tomb, appalled. It is sugary beyond belief, full of flowery flutes. Even the musical prostitutes who recorded this horror hated it. Two pregnant women enter, order lemon tea, and discuss what kinds of fathers their husbands will become. "Not ideal, maybe," I want to lean over and tell them, "but it could be worse. Want to hear my life story?" Lao Tzu coughs a cough of no return, and dabs the phlegm off his vidboy screen. I drag smoke down deep and trickle it out through my nostrils. I never expected Tokyo to be this dirty. It needs a good flooding to clean it up. Mandolineering gondoliers punting down Ginza. "Mind you," continues Dowager to Donkey, "his wives are such grasping, mincing creatures! They want to play the la-di-da company president's wife. I tell my hairdresser this: When you search for a spouse, pick somebody whose dreams are exactly the same size as yours. But does he listen, the brainless ape? Of course not! What would an old woman know about these things?" I inhale the foam from my new coffee. My cup has lipstick traces. I construct a legal case to prove that touching the lipstick with my own lips constitutes a kiss. That would increase my tally of kissed girls to three. Surely, less than the national average for a young male of my years. I think I want to forget the first two girls. I know they have already forgotten me. So I look around Jupiter Cafe for a suitable owner of painted lips. I settle on the waitress with the living, wise, moonlit, viola neck. She is still working through the mountain range of dirty cups and dishes. A tendril of hair has fallen loose. It tickles her nape. Lucky hair! I try to compare the fuchsia color on the cup to her lips, but I cannot see her face properly. My case is shaky. Besides, this lipstick is half-fused with the porcelain atoms. It might have been washed many times. Jupiter Cafe is not the last word in luxury teahouses. My imagination is my worst enemy--no, that is not true, but the comfort it gives is never warmer than tepid. The waitress is a sophisticated Tokyoite. She has enough rich, fashion-conscious, virile admirers to fill a laptop computer. Case dismissed. Lao Tzu growls at his vidboy. "Damn, damn, damn bioborgs! Every damn time!" I drink my dregs, put on my baseball cap, and stare at PanOpticon. Time to locate my maker. PanOpticon's lobby is as cavernous as the belly of some futuristic robo-behemoth. Which is a fair description of the whole PanOpticon organism, only Tokyo moves around it instead of it needing to move around Tokyo. Arrows in the floorpads sense my feet and guide me to a vacant reception booth. I fake boredom. Changes in heart rate may trigger suspicion. A door hisses shut behind me. The blackness is subterranean. A tracer scans me from head to toe, blipping over the bar code on my ID tag. An amber spotlight flicks on, and my reflection stares back from the black glass. I certainly look the part. Overalls, baseball cap, toolbox, clipboard. I adjust my hair and pretend to admire myself. "State your name and business," intones an ice-maiden voice. I wonder how human she is. These days computers humanize and humans computerize and you never know. I pretend to lose my cool slightly, stare at the ceiling, and act the overawed yokel. "Uh . . . Afternoon, madam. Ran Sogabe is my name. I came to do the fish, see." "Company?" "No, I came quite alone." "What is the name of your company? Your employer?" I hear irritation--excellent, my interviewer is only a human. "Finny Friends.

Inc. "Finny Friends?" Inc. Haven't you seen our vidscreen ad? 'If your finny friends are feeling down, don't despair, don't you frown! A brand-new service is in town! If your--'"Why are you requesting access to PanOpticon?" I act puzzled. "I service fish for the Ministry of Law." "Which partners?" "Osugi and Kosugi." "Osugi and Bosugi." She is inexperienced. I check my clipboard. "Right." Let me in, Ice Maiden. Someone as dumb as me can't be a threat to anyone. "I am scanning some curious objects in your toolbox." Now I act proud. "Newly imported from Germany, madam, or might it be mademoiselle? May I present to you the ionic fluorocarb popper! Doubtless a lady of your education is already well aware that the key to a successful marine environment is pH stability. Finny Friends, Inc., is the first aquaculturist practice in Japan to utilize this little wonder. If time permits, perhaps you would allow me to--" Place your right hand on the pad in front of you. "I hope this is going to tickle." "That is your left hand." "Beg your pardon." A brief eternity passes before a green authorized light blinks. "And your access code?" Ice Maiden is thorough. I scrunch my eyes. "Let me see: 313-636-969." "Your access code is valid . . ." So it should be--I paid the finest freelance hacker in the city three months' salary for those nine digits. ". . . for the month of July. We are now in August." That scuzzy bum hacker. "Uh . . . weird." I scratch my crotch to buy time. "That was the access number encoded and received from--" I glance at my clipboard "--Ms. Akiko Kato. They don't come much higher up than her." "Your access code is invalid." I puff out my cheeks. "If you say so, if you say so. Pity, though. When Ms. Kato wants to know why her Okinawan silverspines--priceless, for all intents and purposes, now they are on the near-extinct list--are belly-up dead on the surface, I'll just have to refer her to you. Oh, well. What did you say your name was?" I pose with my pen. Ice Maiden hardens. "Check your access codes and return tomorrow." I shake my head, amused. "If only saving silverspines from asphyxiation were that simple! Do you have any idea how many finny friends I got on my turf? Obviously not. In the old days, we had more give and take, but now we run to an hour-by-hour time frame. Even as I stand here I got ninety angelfish at the Metropolitan gasping for a gill scour. Now. Your name? This is just so we don't get sued and I am not the one who loses my job." Ice Maiden hesitates. "Look," I say, "why not call Ms Kato's secretary?" "I already did. You are expected tomorrow. Not today." "Tomorrow?" I will electrocute my freelance hacker, very slowly. "Of course I was expected tomorrow. But the Minister for Fish issued an industry-wide warning last night. Aquatic gill-and-mouth ebola has entered the country. The Cubans are to blame, apparently. The spores, traveling down air ducts, enter tanks, lodge in brain tissue, and puff up the fish until they literally explode. Innards everywhere. The scientists are working on a cure, but until then--" Ice Maiden finally cracks. "Ancillary authorization granted, Mr. Sogabe. From this booth proceed to the elevator, which will take you to the eighty-first floor. You must leave PanOpticon within sixty minutes, and follow the sensor arrows at all times, or Security will not be held responsible for any injuries." "Level eighty-one, Mr. Sogabe," announces the elevator. "I look forward to serving you again." The doors open and for a moment I think I am in a virtual rainforest. Pots, ferns, and plants half-conceal the reception desk. An aviary of vidphones trills. A woman puts down a spray mister and peers at me from behind a hyacinth as high as herself. "Security told me Mr. Sogabe was coming. Who are you?" "Let me guess! Kazuyo? Kazuyo. Am I right?" "No. I'm Fubuki. But who--" "Ms. Fubuki! Of course! No wonder Ran calls you his PanOpticon Delight!" "Who are you and what do you want?" I act a young man driven by flattery failure into digging a deeper pit. "Uh, I'm Ran's--I mean Mr. Sogabe's--apprentice. Joji. Don't tell me he never mentioned me! I do Harajuku normally, but I'm covering Mr. Sogabe's Shinjuku clients too this month on account of his, uh . . ."

I look left and right, and whisper, ". . . genital malaria." Her face falls. "I beg your pardon?" From the Hardcover edition.