



The Kingdom

By Fuminori Nakamura

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Zen-Noir master Nakamura returns to the Tokyo of *The Thief*, where a young grifter named Yurika finds herself in a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with the shadowy crime lord Kizaki.

Yurika is a freelancer in the Tokyo underworld. She poses as a prostitute, carefully targeting potential johns, selecting powerful and high-profile men. When she is alone with them, she drugs them and takes incriminating photos to sell for blackmail purposes. She knows very little about the organization she's working for, and is perfectly satisfied with the arrangement, as long as it means she doesn't have to reveal anything about her identity, either. She operates alone and lives a private, solitary life, doing her best to lock away painful memories.

But when a figure from Yurika's past resurfaces, she realizes there is someone out there who knows all her secrets: her losses, her motivations, her every move. There are whispers of a crime lord named Kizaki—"a monster," she is told—and Yurika finds herself trapped in a game of cat and mouse. Is she wily enough to escape one of the most sadistic men in Tokyo?

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Kingdom*

"Nakamura has described *The Kingdom* as a sister novel to *The Thief* . . . But the new novel bests its companion."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Few protagonists in modern crime fiction are as alienated as those in the challenging, violent, grotesque tales of Japanese author Fuminori Nakamura . . . Yurika's struggle to escape her vexed fate elevates this shocker well above the lurid."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"Multilayered and intense . . . [The] monstrous crime lord 'Kizaki' is a formidable nemesis."

—*The Independent (UK)*

"*The Kingdom* offers another sample of Japanese author Fuminori Nakamura's heady blend of disaffected philosophy and noir suspense."

—**Shelf Awareness**

"Dark and strangely seductive... A recommended read for fans of noir as well as for anyone looking to be mesmerized by a masterful storyteller."

—*Pank Magazine*

"A face-paced, dark novel of psychological suspense, told in a succinctly poetic style."

—*Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*

"[Yurika] makes an ideal guide into Nakamura's nightmare kingdom, one node in a nihilistic entanglement of lives forged outside of conventional legal and moral frameworks."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"With a complex yet sympathetic antiheroine who must outwit the most cunning and twisted minds, - Nakamura's dark crime novel sets the bar for gritty, twisted plots that keep readers constantly guessing."

—*Library Journal*

"Nakamura is in a class by himself . . . His straightforward prose advances the story quickly, even as he creates an atmosphere that shimmers around the edges while slowly transforming the environment and the characters."

—**Book Reporter**

"On a par with Jo Nesbo or Don Winslow."

—**Lit Hub**

"Suspense writing at its tautest and most philosophical."

—**Politics and Prose Bookstore**

"Unsettling, *The Kingdom* offers both psychological suspense on the most intimate personal level as well as some sinister geo-political (un-)doings in the background . . . A quick, dark read, in which the reader is—like Yurika—constantly kept off balance."

—**The Complete Review**

"A classic in the making... Just make sure there's room in your schedule for recovery from this highly purposeful journey into darkness."

—**Kingdom Books**

"If I had to name just one author who is absolutely iconic in the field of border- and boundary-crushing noir, it would be Fuminori Nakamura."

—**Shotgun Logic**

"Nakamura excels in writing brief, taut suspense and both this work and his exemplary *The Gun* really should be on your reading list."

—**Bookgasm.com**

Praise for Fuminori Nakamura

"Crime fiction that pushes past the bounds of genre, occupying its own nightmare realm . . . Guilt or innocence is not the issue; we are corrupted, complicit, just by living in society. The ties that bind, in other words, are rules beyond our making, rules that distance us not only from each other but also from ourselves."

—**Los Angeles Times**

"This slim, icy, outstanding thriller, reminiscent of Muriel Spark and Patricia Highsmith, should establish Fuminori Nakamura as one of the most interesting Japanese crime novelists at work today."

—**USA Today**

"Nakamura's prose is cut-to-the-bone lean, but it moves across the page with a seductive, even voluptuous agility."

—**Richmond Times-Dispatch**

"Some of the darkest noir fiction to come out of Japan—or any country—in recent years . . . Nakamura's stories, however labeled, are memorable forays into uncomfortable terrain."

—**Mystery Scene**

About the Author

Fuminori Nakamura has won numerous prizes for his writing, including the ?e Prize, Japan's largest literary award; the David L. Goodis Award for Noir Fiction; and the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. *The Thief*, his first novel to be translated into English, was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. His other works include *Evil and the Mask*, *The Gun*, *The Boy in the Earth*, and *Last Winter, We Parted*.

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Chapter 1

When did I realize I would never get what I wanted most?

Maybe I was in my twenties. Or maybe I was a child, just old enough to make sense of the world. Back when I did nothing but glare at everyone around me, what I wanted most was far away. It was not something tangible. It made my skin burn. It ignored all the rules. It went beyond morals and reason. It was something that could overturn the foundations of everything I thought my life would become. I wonder if I still want it.

What would I do if I got it?

The man in front of me, bathed in blue light, was looking at me. I smiled and watched the passion build in his eyes. He glanced at my chest, then returned his gaze to my face. He acted relaxed as he closed in on me one step at a time.

“I can’t believe it. I’d never have thought you were a prostitute.”

Properly speaking, I’m not a prostitute, but I smiled anyway. The man slid his fingers between mine.

“I don’t tell anyone I don’t like,” I said. “It’s wonderful. Much better than watching TV.”

I pressed my body against his and kissed his neck. I held his hand gently, and brought it up to my chest. He touched my chest reluctantly. Though I didn’t feel anything special, I began to mix heavy breathing into my speech.

“. . . You can forget it all. Do what you want to me. Mmm . . . Whatever you want.”

His temperature rose. Humans do not always make rational decisions. When our senses are shaken, we become defenseless. I felt the hand on my breast growing bolder. I stroked the man’s lips with my finger, and put a pill in his mouth.

“What’s this?”

“It’s kind of like a mild Viagra. You can get it at any pharmacy, but it’s pretty good.”

I stretched my legs from my short skirt and forced them between his. I kissed his neck, wrapped my arms around him, and whispered, “Let’s do it. Let’s do it.” With my lips pressed against his neck, I felt him swallow the pill. He pushed me violently onto the bed. He was completely engrossed in me. I held his body against my chest. The feeling that I was in control of him got me hot. There was no sign of his turning back. I pretended to fool around, avoided his kisses, and wrapped my arms around his neck. I gently petted the man’s head. His face was buried in my chest. I continued stroking his head until he stopped moving.

I watched the man with detachment as his hands began to slow. Strangely, looking into those half-closed eyes, I got hot again at my own act of treachery. The heat traveled through my body, raising my pulse and causing sounds of joy to gurgle up from deep inside me. I slowly brought my mouth to his ear.

“Don’t worry. It’s not poison.”

There was something evil in the glow of the room’s blue lights. I felt the weight of the man on top of me. He could no longer move. His eyes were closed. I stared long into his face. I realized that I wanted him. I wanted the passion he had until a moment ago. I wanted his shoulders, which were quite muscular for his age, and his naturally tan face. I got out from under his body, sat in a chair, and lit a cigarette. I had to wait like this until he fell into a deep sleep.

It was raining outside.

The quiet rising up from the man’s body joined the sound of the rain.

I carefully removed the man’s light blue shirt, and then slowly pulled his white tank top off over his head. His tanned chest was broad, like I thought it would be. I took off my blouse, so I only had on a bra, and put on sunglasses. I lay in bed next to the topless man, put his arm under my head, and took several pictures of us head on. I also recorded a video. Last time, when my victim was a politician, I understood why I’d been hired. Why anyone needed these kinds of pictures of a TV anchor, I didn’t know. I expected he thought I was just a normal person drinking in that bar. He probably hadn’t thought I’d been watching him the whole time.

After carefully redressing him, my job was done. I’d created a point of weakness in his life. I took some money from his wallet and put it in my own. I saw a receipt from an expensive Japanese restaurant, and his gym membership card. I lit another cigarette, and wrote a message on the hotel’s note pad.

“I didn’t touch your cards. Procuring prostitutes is illegal . . . I’m sure you understand.”

The very existence of prostitutes is illegal, so when he’d tried to buy me, he’d become a criminal, too. He had been seduced into criminality. Who with any standing in society would go to the police over this much money? When he read the note I left, he’d think only his money was stolen. But really, he’d be wrong.

The blue lights in the hotel room were still letting off their evil glow. What were those lights

illuminating? Maybe the petty crime of this man who had tried to buy me, even though he had a ring on his finger? Or maybe, my existence.

I carefully fixed my makeup in the bathroom, put on my coat, and left the room. Though the building didn't stand out much, on the inside it was a luxury love hotel. I exited the elevator and as I walked past the front desk, Saito said, "Good night." At places like this, you can only see the wrists of whoever's working the front desk, but I happen to know Saito has a very handsome face.

"You too. Sorry if he makes a fuss."

"It'll be fine."

The lobby's huge, gaudy chandelier made me feel better. Its showiness seemed to mock the world. When I left the hotel, the men walking the late-night streets looked at me, their gazes crossing one another's, full of all kinds of emotions. I walked slowly through all of those gazes. A black car was parked on the side of the hotel like it was meant to be there. It reflected, or maybe repelled, the neon lights. It was a luxury car. Some brand I didn't know. I opened the door and got in. The heater wasn't even on inside.

The man in the driver's seat didn't say anything when I got in. He says his name is Yata, but that's probably not his real name. When I showed him the digital camera, he took it casually and put it in his attaché case. Yata's eyes are small, and his face is plain, but he has beautiful fingers.

"You can get the pictures of him going in from Saito."

"I already got them."

The inside of the car was freezing. We were cut off from the noise of the night.

"But . . . Why a TV anchor?"

"One of your best qualities is that you don't pry. Remember that."

He gave me an envelope full of money, but I didn't need it much anymore.

I got out of the car and turned my back to it as Yata stepped on the gas. I walked through the city. The heat from pulling that man close to me, and the heat from betraying him, still lingered in my body. A tout who I knew by face started talking to me. In front of a hotel, a Chinese woman was negotiating with a client. There were older men walking with younger girls, and older women walking with younger men. The obscene neon. The light that makes fun of the world. Night makes people's desires take on physical form. Night forgives people for letting loose the desires they keep buried inside.

The moon shone down from over my head, casting its light on the neon's glow. After the sun sets, the moon steals its light to illuminate our existence.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Williams:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love The Kingdom, you may enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh occur its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

Heidi Odom:

In this time globalization it is important to someone to obtain information. The information will make professionals understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information much

easier to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, paper, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher in which print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to your account is The Kingdom this book consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented just how can the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer value to explain it is easy to understand. The particular writer made some research when he makes this book. That is why this book appropriate all of you.

Joshua Dunleavy:

Is it a person who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something new? This The Kingdom can be the answer, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a geek activity. So what these books have than the others?

John Jeanbaptiste:

Many people said that they feel bored stiff when they reading a guide. They are directly felt the idea when they get a half portions of the book. You can choose the actual book The Kingdom to make your personal reading is interesting. Your own skill of reading proficiency is developing when you such as reading. Try to choose simple book to make you enjoy to learn it and mingle the feeling about book and reading through especially. It is to be very first opinion for you to like to wide open a book and read it. Beside that the guide The Kingdom can to be your brand new friend when you're feel alone and confuse with what must you're doing of these time.

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