



Brutus Nation 2: Hammer of the Hogs

Kris Kyzer

FriesenPress (Oct 27, 2020)

Softcover \$15.99 (174pp)

978-1-5255-8083-3

Brutus Nation 2 is an action-packed and atmospheric dystopian thriller set in a corrupt society.

In Kris Kyzer's bombastic thriller *Brutus Nation 2: Hammer of the Hogs*, an ex-con incites violence in a capitalistic dystopia, while the elite maneuver to capture power and land.

In an alternative reality, drug lords and corporations enact a ruthless rule over the contemporary analogue country of the Athenian Union. Crowbar is fresh out of prison when he's put to work for the Athenian Union Interior Ministry as an unofficial enforcer. His first task is to sow discontent and pit the numerous gangs of the city against each other with targeted attacks. Meanwhile, banking-backed gambling sets up an escrow wherein gamblers bet on credit and amass huge interest rates. The city begins to burn, and people are evicted, while a sports team owner embarks on a drastic plan to build a new stadium. The three elements collide as disparate elements of the Athenian Union connive to carve out a piece of the city for themselves without tipping the city into full chaos.

Crowbar is a fascinating if shallow character with a singular drive: to better his life. The reason for his incarceration fades into the background as the assignment to upset the balance in the Athenian Union draws focus. Through clever use of high-tech gadgets and age-old manpower, Crowbar flies under the radar in his attempt to not only inflate conflict, but draw attention away from the real power plays. The other main characters—a banker, a team owner, a drug lord—are built upon singular traits, making them somewhat interchangeable.

There's a sensory level of detail throughout. The text focuses in on visual elements: the state of a body, or the aftermath of an intense shootout. The book's intriguing world building also makes satirical use of brand names and registered trademarks for any in-world product, resulting in a sense that consumerism distracts and suppresses the populace. Its modern technology features unusual names—"pixkin" for football and "binox" for binoculars—that are confusing before the introduction of contextual clues. The Athenian Union functions as a commentary on modern life, with its large corporations that have more power than governments, and its pockets of gangs that are allowed to prosper.

Crowbar speaks in colorful phrases, and his voice is the best among the book's dialogues. When more than two characters are present, the conversations become less easy to follow, especially when the speakers are unnamed. Still, the story is explosive and dramatic throughout, especially when it's transitioning to and from Crowbar's sections. Its series of seemingly unrelated threads are tied together as the story progresses; it crescendos in a citywide event. Even before the threads connect, each of the disparate plotlines brims with the grime and violence of the world while feeling like a complete story.

Atmospheric and action-packed, *Brutus Nation 2* is a dystopian thriller set in a corrupt society whose worst elements are dragged through the mud in an explosive, entertaining manner.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January 8, 2021)

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