



## Brutus Nation

**Kris Kyzer**

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*Vengeance drives the plot of this fiendish, darkly sharp noir thriller.*

There's little true light in the Athenian Union of Kris Kyzer's *Brutus Nation*—only the artificial conflagration of revenge. This cinematically violent thriller burns with a dystopian edge.

*Brutus Nation* is set in a contemporary alternative reality, a place in which drug lords have plotted control of the government agencies that outwardly work against them, and in which all are vulnerable to the sins of their pasts. Modern foibles are given exaggerated treatment, so that sports events are bent, in gladiator style, at the whims of those in charge, and all political calculation is likely to end both with momentary success, and with knives to the back. In the center of this dark milieu roils a dangerous cartel headed by sadistic brothers and protected by a vicious hitman, Estez, who lives with "a hurricane of fury raging inside."

As the Benitez brothers wrangle control over a bleak version of North America, bodies accumulate; fatal blows are delivered to those who appear to have overcome the minor mistakes of earlier years. No character achieves peace for long: gamblers find that their luck has run out, happy family men are snuffed in their sleep. The prose of such paragraphs is relentless, with both sex and death meted out in language crude and evocative; and yet alongside such scenes are bits of black humor, as characters speak with lilts both barbaric and poetic, accusing each other of having "latrine lip," while the narration coldly details shootouts in which officers "spouted slugs into thugs."

The unceasing nature of *Brutus Nation's* violent events is likely to result in graphic novel and video game comparisons, particularly considering the profusion of lines like "the claret from the wound left a red swoosh on the blazingly white wall." Monstrous actions all serve the larger plot, though. The fiendish genius of this work is that its continual violence cannot be called gratuitous, while its few moments of humanity, which are all squelched quickly, are themselves the sore thumb of the whole. Even apparently morally pure characters may find themselves sullied by the novel's end. Expressions of love lack the dimensionality of the organizing scheme, and the few tears shed throughout can likely be filed as "crocodile." The last twist is a bit of a narrative cheat, but the whole package is effectively wicked and surprising.

*Brutus Nation* is a swift and merciless noir thriller in which no one is safe from the ambitious and bitter decisions of those afforded even the slightest social control.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (April 28, 2016)

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