

## Tokyo Traffic: A Detective Hiroshi Mystery

**Michael Pronko**

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*Taut and terse, this noir novel is executed to perfection.*

Michael Pronko's *Tokyo Traffic* is a hard-boiled murder mystery featuring the tough but lovable Detective Hiroshi Shimizu.

At the dark novel's heart is Sukanya, a Bangkok native and part of Asia's underground trade in young women's flesh. At its beginning, Sukanya is on the run from sex traffickers who not only want her back, but also want the computer that she stole from them. Sukanya has an ally in Chiho, a Japanese girl who lives in one of Tokyo's many internet cafés.

This story intersects with Hiroshi when the police detective is called in to investigate a triple murder at a porn studio, which leads him deep into the underbelly of Tokyo. Although it is one of the world's safest cities, Tokyo also has a thriving black market that specializes in drugs, sex, violence, and unlicensed exports.

In this excellent noir title, Hiroshi is a tough, streetwise officer. His investigation is aided by two friends: a former sumo wrestler, Sakaguchi, and an old school chum, Takamatsu. Neither man is a trained peace officer or sleuth, but the trio pushes the narrative, navigating the complex alleyways and derelict clubs and hangouts of the city in order to figure out who is responsible for a rash of deaths. Sukanya and Chiho push the story from another direction as they elude a conspiracy of gangsters. Tension rises as the two paths meet and the conclusion nears.

There is not much mystery involved in reading; the villains are known almost from the beginning. In the place of whodunit elements, the novel focuses on describing, blow by blow, how Hiroshi and his friends piece together a series of horrific crimes with an obvious connection to mobsters based in Japan and Thailand. The beginning, middle, and end all share the same quality of sociological commentary and cynicism. This is a captivating mix executed to perfection by taut and terse writing.

The prose has a forceful punch. Verbs dominate, and the short chapters all help to keep the central story in focus. Rather than unimportant diversions about Hiroshi's habits or his idiosyncrasies, the novel uses action and sharp dialogue to keep everything moving. Tokyo becomes its own character; the city and its residents, especially its unsavory ones, are described in detail, making every element seem familiar. *Tokyo Traffic* is an excellent addition to the Detective Hiroshi series.

BENJAMIN WELTON (June 8, 2020)

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