

The Gun

Fuminori Nakamura

"Last night, I found a gun," says the protagonist at the beginning of Japanese author Nakamura's (*The Thief; Evil and the Mask*) newly translated first novel (which won the Shincho Prize for New Writers in 2002), but it might be better said that the gun found him. From the moment Nishikawa, an unmotivated student, sees the gun lying next to a dead body and claims it, the gun fills him with a sense of power and purpose he's never before felt. What begins as admiration for the physicality of this "beautiful" weapon—how it feels and how it makes him feel—soon gives way to an escalating compulsion to use it. Even the presence of a policeman investigating the dead man and the missing gun isn't enough to curb Nishikawa's growing impulses. His obsession with every intricacy of the object, told in flat and tedious detail, may initially frustrate, but it lends a terrific tension, as readers wonder how far he will go as his grasp on reality gets more detached. **VERDICT** Light on action but suspenseful to the last page, Nakamura's existential noir translates well to America, a timely allegory for our gun-crazed culture.