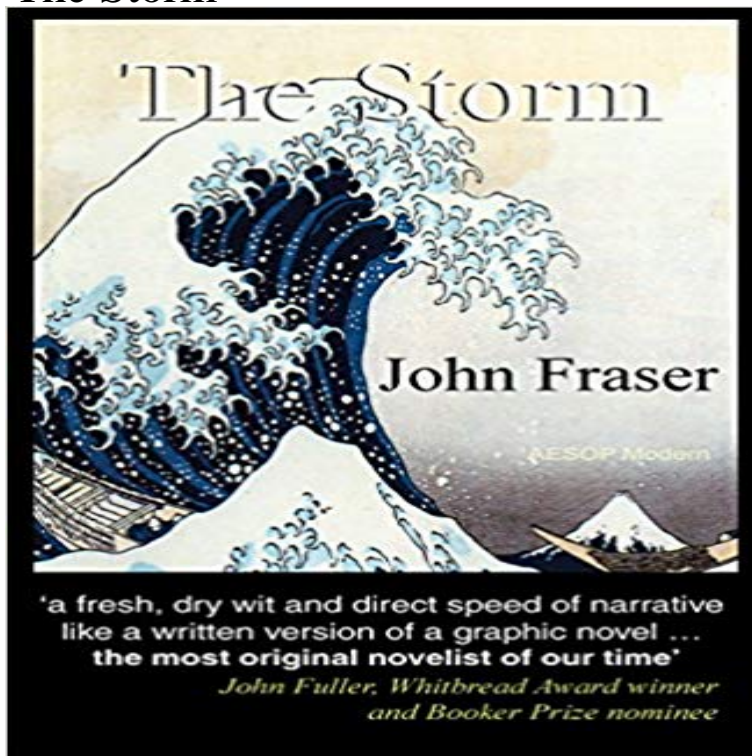


## The Storm



In John Fraser's novel *The Storm*, three policy experts are at a conference, where their principals are swept away by a storm. One of the experts is held for ransom, but is released in time to join the others as they discuss the new, leaderless, dispensation. They try various strategies to achieve power: the ex-Yugoslav, suspected of war crimes, and possible under-age sexual misdemeanours, proposes infiltrating the bureaucracy, but is unsuccessful. The initiative seems to lie with Melinda, the best-connected expert, who is also an adventurous musician. They consider an incursion into the US, and China both in crisis, with their populations and resources in disarray. They make various attempts at exploration: the third expert is involved in a complex inner odyssey, and seek inspiration from a young explorer, Niobe, and an academic, Delphine. The group, led by Melinda, eventually decide on an incursion into Southern China, with the aim of securing positions of power in the newly re-organised polity. About the author: John Fraser is the author of 18 works of literary and speculative fiction. He has lived in Rome since 1980. Previously he worked in England and Canada. The distinguished poet, novelist and Booker Prize nominee John Fuller has written of Fraser's fiction: One of the most extraordinary publishing events of the past few years has been the rapid, indeed insistent, appearance of the novels of John Fraser. There are few parallels in literary history to this almost simultaneous and largely belated appearance of a mature oeuvre, sprung like Athena from Zeus's forehead; and the novels in themselves are extraordinary. I can think of nothing much like them in fiction. Fraser maintains a masterfully ironic distance from the extreme conditions in which his characters find themselves. There are strikingly beautiful descriptions, veiled allusions to rooted traditions, unlikely events

half-glimpsed, abrupt narratives, surreal but somehow apposite social customs. Frasers work is conceived on a heroic scale in terms both of its ideas and its situational metaphors. If he were to be filmed, it would need the combined talents of a Bunuel, a Gilliam, a Cameron. Like Thomas Pynchon, whom in some ways he resembles, Fraser is a deep and serious fantasist, wildly inventive. The reader rides as on a switchback or luge of impetuous attention, with effects flashing by at virtuoso speeds. The characters seem to be unwitting agents of chaos, however much wise reflection the author bestows upon them. They move with shrugging self-assurance through circumstances as richly-detailed and as without reliable compass-points as a Chinese scroll.

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