Stephen: The Reign of Anarchy (Penguin Monarchs)

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Known as 'the anarchy', the reign of Stephen (1135-1141) saw England plunged into a civil war that illuminated the fatal flaw in the powerful Norman monarchy: without rules ordering succession, conflict within William the Conqueror's family was inevitable. But there was another problem: Stephen himself. With the nobility of England and Normandy anxious about the prospect of a world without the tough love of the old king Henry I, Stephen styled himself a political panacea—a promise he was unable to keep. Unable to transcend his flawed claim to the throne, Stephen's actions betrayed his uneasiness. As Watkins shows here, the resulting violence throughout England arose from the struggle to navigate a new and turbulent kind of politics.

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