



In the City of Shy Hunters

Tom Spanbauer

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Tom Spanbauer is one of the most enchanting writers in America today, and *In the City of Shy Hunters*, his first novel in ten years, is a "rich and colorful" portrait of New York in the 1980s, told with "raw power" (David Wiegand, *San Francisco Chronicle*). Shy, afflicted with a stutter, and struggling with his sexuality, Will Parker comes to New York to escape the provincial western towns where he grew up. In New York, he finds himself surrounded for the first time by people who understand and celebrate his quirks and flaws. He also begins an unforgettable love affair with a volatile, six-foot-five African-American drag queen and performance artist named Rose. But even as he is falling in love with Rose and growing into himself, Will must watch as AIDS escalates from a rumor into a devastating tragedy. When a vicious riot erupts in a local park, Will seizes the chance to repay the city for all it has taught him, in a climax that will leave readers shaken, fulfilled, and changed. "In the City of Shy Hunters is so finely crafted ... you'll think you've been reading a modernist classic." -- Peter Kurth, *Salon.com* "Spanbauer's genius resides even in the asides ... teas[ing] out the genuine complexity of human love." -- Thomas McGonigle, *The Washington Post Book World* "Ambitious and compelling ... a mixture of the ghastly, the hilarious, and the curiously touching." -- John Hartl, *The Seattle Times* "In the City of Shy Hunters has the earmarks of a literary landmark ... Its importance and originality are unmistakable." -- Laura Demanski, *The Baltimore Sun*

In the City of Shy Hunters Details

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From Reader Review In the City of Shy Hunters for online ebook

Brandi Declue says

Honestly, I am over half way done and it has been a struggle to get this far. The writing style is frustrating and the grammar Nazi in me wants to scream at him "a complete sentence needs a verb!" He will write these sentences like this "The red chair." or "The unrelenting light." I should be getting used to it by now, but it is little things like this that are getting in the way of my enjoyment of the book. There is a lot of sex in this book which distracts me. I admit to being somewhat uncomfortable with reading these scenes and figuring out exactly how they are significant to the story. Some are, most aren't. But that is just my humble opinion.

To say if I like this book or not would be to simplify the issue here. Because my answer would be that yes, I do like it, and no, I don't. I am kept up at night reading it and I can't tell if it is because I am hooked or because I want to have it over with. The main character reminds me of Mersault from Camus' The Stranger. Perhaps it is just the way he is written. This character, Will, is not without feeling, yet he seems to be a passive man, living life as it happens to him rather than making it happen. I get the sense that this will change though, and so I read on.....

Ezra says

I was completely entranced by this book and sobbed my way through the end, especially in love with Rose. This book is magical realism about queers dealing with AIDS and performance art in the 1980s in NYC - the Tompkins Sq Park riot is a central moment, and the book is dedicated to Ethyl Eichelberger, among others. On first reading, I felt nervous about the many characters that are mystical people of color... I think TS is a white guy (?) so it raised flags for me, but in the end I think TS's writing is insightful and illuminating about racism (among many other things). I just read this book a second time and was completely swept away all over again. the writing craft was even more moving this time, seeing the well-woven subtle introductions of information that becomes important later in the story. SO GOOD!

J. says

This is an amazing novel.

It feels epic, larger than it's own story. And that's not easy for a book written in minimalist prose.

I think the only thing I didn't like about the book was the character Fiona. But the reason I didn't like her was because she was written so realistically as THAT kind of person--so even the thing I didn't like about the book is a point of praise.

A warning, though: This book is not meant to be escapist, nor as a quick read to help you get through a flight or a bus ride. This is serious prose about very serious things, and it demands attention. That's what makes it so good--that it moves with deliberate steps instead of trying to sprint. I'd say HIGHLY recommended, but this one isn't for everyone. However, if you take reading seriously, or if you are an author who wants a masterclass in writing, get this novel immediately.

Only someone THIS good could have been a teacher to Chuck Palahniuk.

Ruby says

After reading this book, I wanted to go back and change my ratings of all the other books I gave five stars to. This is the book I've been waiting for.

To call *In the City* lyrical is certainly true, but also disappointing, ordinary. I would invent new words for this book, choreograph a 1000-person line dance in Thompkins Square Park, a humble tribute. I want to buy a copy for every rehab and homeless shelter and gay community center in the country. I want to live in this book. I have lived in this book. I am still living in this book.

I'm in love with the characters: William of Heaven, Fiona Yet, Rose and Ruby, Charlie and True Shot. They are my Art Family, hanging out in the basement of my memory, lovely new additions to the swarm under the jumbotron that says "Gotham." How could new people -- fictional characters, even -- insinuate themselves into something so impermeable as my own history? It's magic, but they have done just that.

Speaking of magic: I knew there was a divine tether between the Known Universe and this book, that it is somehow a hologram of the human experience twisted into a raunchy fable. That is magic enough, but here's some more magic: *In the City of Shy Hunters* was published in the early months of 2001. Here's a quote from p. 437:

"As I lit the cigarette, the World Trade Center was in the rearview mirror, and I turned around to look. The World Trade Center buildings were so beyond human they'd disappeared."

This book is a beautiful example of contemporary urban wisdom, heart, and tragedy, as it truly is -- inseparable from, a celebration of the whole, of Life Cafe: the ouroboros, the peace pipe, and the dog shit.

Ted Lewis says

One of the most heart-wrenching, gorgeous, devastating books I've ever read.

"Why else do we live except to love and remember those we love?"

"Whether you fight it, cop an attitude, fuck it, or fall in love with it, you're still going to die. We're all just in our bodies for a moment in our life. Such a brave and lovely act it is to let the body celebrate..."

Ryan says

I came to this book fully prepared to hate it or at the very least find it "just okay." Spanbaur tends to give it all away (albeit cryptically) at the very beginning of his books, (which is a choice I generally like with him) and this book was no exception. However, as I read the introductory pages i couldn't help but feel like I was in for another rehash of the same old ideas I'd already explored with him. And while *In the City of Shy Hunters* is similar to *The Man Who Fell In Love With The Moon and Now Is the Hour* in style, in content, it is quite different. And besides, even if Spanbaur's books are kind of all the same, he's a great author! So, even though *Shy Hunters* feels a bit like a rehash (something that quietly gnawed at me while reading *Now Is the Hour*) there's enough fresh material here to make the book excellent in its own right.

Basically, if you like Tom Spanbauer, you'll probably like this book. If you're looking to get into him, don't start here. This is definitely his most difficult work and his most shocking. But in the end, it's also one of his most rewarding.

Steve Woods says

If this story does not rip your heart out, you are either not human or a Pharasee. It is the story of a sensitive young man who leaves Idaho, fleeing from violence and abuse and all that so often accompanies poverty and despair, and heads for New York in search of the one person who truly loved him, a boy he grew up with. It explores the lives of "the shy hunters", those people who became his friends, his companions, his lovers and his teachers, during the first terrible scourge of the AIDS epidemic in New York.

This book had a profound impact on me, there was much about the "underbelly" that is the big city for fringe dwellers that was so familiar to me. My own journey into that particular hades turned up not so many with as much nobility as Will or Rose or True Shot, but there were some I did glimpse, some who I touched and who touched me. At that time I was too young to see what was before me in them, but I do see it now.

It is a story of deep anguish, loss and suffering but also a story of great abiding love bewteen those who have only each other and their own pain. Much touched me, there were so many memories, of savage, moments quiet moments and tenderness. On the whole it really did my head in for a while, I need some time to absorb it all; including some of the most profound lines I have had the privelege to read in the English language. "Fate leads those who will and drags those who won't".

This is not a story of the Readers Digest variety. To experience it fully I think somehow, like me, you will probably have to have been there!

Matthew says

I should probably give this book four stars, but I can't.

I started volunteering with people living with HIV/AIDS when I got to college. It seemed like the right thing to do. It was a show a gratitude to those who'd come before to make my gay life easier. It was a promise that my generation would learn our lessons; keep ourselves healthy.

In the five years I volunteered, I watched young men grow horribly old and die. I discovered how strong the will to live can be. I learned to smile in the face of death; to pretend it wasn't waiting on the couch to take someone else away. And I learned how to say goodbye to beautiful people who didn't get a chance to fulfill their potential. The specter was always close.

After college, I volunteered elsewhere, and learned different things. That the drugs were getting better. People were dying at a more reasonable rate. That life didn't have to end, and that healthy was an option. And I got to stop saying so many goodbyes. And there was talk of a vaccine; a hope that maybe this would end.

And then it didn't. People are still healthy, the drugs work, and sometimes they don't. People get sick, and

sometimes they get better. Sometimes they die and I have to remember to say goodbye.

But it's worse now. Now, those young men (and women) are my friends. I knew them before, and now I have to know them after. Watch the struggle. Count the pills. Know about the medical appointments; the tests. Know the counts and the stats and the treatments and the services and the struggle.

And I still can smile. And offer support and advice. I still know which support groups meet when, and I make referrals to service providers. And I make a mean chicken soup.

But I'm tired, and I don't want to do it anymore. I want it to be over, and it's not. It keeps going on. And every time I read "AIDS" in this book, a tiny part of me wanted to hide and never come back. And that's why I had to give it three stars.

But it really deserved four.

Kat Masek says

At the back of my mind, I knew he was, but with my reading of this novel, Tom Spanbauer, moved consciously to my top--what?--five favorite novelists ever. He takes chances, he digs so deeply into what we all wonder about, wish for, seek. He proves that the subject of a tale is its mere overlay, that what is most important is what lies underneath. And Spanbauer is fearless. His book says it all about confronting fear and finding courage. Spanbauer knows what life is for, no matter what the terrors of one's own life may be.

Jonathan says

William of Heaven arrives in New York in 1983, searching for Charlie 2Moons, his childhood friend and the love of his life. From the start there is an ethereal, almost magical feel to this beautifully written novel - no-one is ordinary, the characters' names conjure up a cross between a fairy tale and a fantasy: Fiona Yet, Ruby Prestigiacomo, True Shot, and the improbably named Argwings Khodek. Some have other names, few of them meet each other, but all of them shape the life of the somewhat innocent new arrival. William's innocence is short-lived however, especially in a time and place where AIDS is taking a grip on the lives of many of the characters. As the story progresses we travel back in time to witness episodes in Will's childhood in Idaho, when, with his sister Bobbie, he meets Charlie for the first time, and together they decide to learn stunt riding tricks on their horses. Their idyllic childhood begins to unravel though, and leads to a tragic turn of events.

Tragedy occurs in the lives of most of the characters in the book, but whether he writes of this or lighter things, Tom Spanbauer does so with his customary poetic brilliance. If you are after a straightforward narrative, depicting the politics and high emotions of the times, then don't look here. Both are central to the story, but the style is one of high drama and uniquely expressive phrases. Repeated throughout the book, phrases such as 'Never touch me', 'It's all drag', 'No, no Yoko Ono', 'WALK/DON'T WALK' add a hypnotic quality to the writing, almost pulling you into the page each time you see the same words. This is a modern classic for those who love the unusual, recalling a time that should never be forgotten.

Jaina Bee says

Like his "Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon" novel, it took me a long time to get into this, but once I did, it threw me around like a good mosh pit. Spanbauer is a patient writer, as at ease with brutality and blasphemy as he is with the most tender and discreet emotions.

But like many a good mosh pit, it seemed more like a tribute to that urge than the urge itself. Even the most harrowing or passionate scenes were so classically constructed that the emotional impact fell short of what the scene called for. Perhaps I am a poor reader, because I know that this is great writing.

Where the emotions and images resonated the strongest and purest were in the delicate, internal moments of our moustachioed protagonist. Sexy Einstein.

Speaking of which, Spanbauer is the master of unusual and tenacious catch phrases. Every time he wrote "Another New Yorker gone to Hell," I heard a car alarm, right on cue. The writing is vivid, sensual, and almost musical. Plus, this would make an excellent film.

Lydia says

(Sorry, Bert. I hope you can forgive me and that we can move on from this average rating.)

We'll disregard the first 150 pages of this book because I wasn't into the beginning of this book. I don't know what it was I was just kind of bored.

Tom Spanbauer still has the ability to write some really fucking incredible lines that punch you in the gut. And scenes of this book were freaking incredible and intimate and raw. It was brutal, especially towards the end of the book when he really, *really* started focusing in on the AIDS crisis.

But I wasn't that attached to the characters in this? Which is really weird because normally Spanbauer can get me really emotionally involved with his characters, but I felt kind of detached from them in this one. Which is maybe why I didn't enjoy it as much as his others? Who knows tbh.

Malonie says

Love is available even in the darkest, most remote hiding places. Spanbauer's prose is so outstanding that I feel he has created a new way of writing. The flaws of these characters feel so real that these characters become people you wish you could talk with. They are funny and sad and trying to figure out how to survive in a fucked up world. And the fact that they succeed makes you feel you can too.

Andrea says

3.5 stars. There's this thing Tom Spanbauer does where he repeats certain words and phrases over and over

again. I find it equally endearing and irritating. That pretty much describes how I feel about this book.

Jack says

I've already gushed about Tom Spanbauer in my "review" of *Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. This book is similarly well written, but much different; reading it was literally gut-wrenching. Being as I'm an ancient homo, and half of my life has been lived in the shadow of HIV/AIDS, I've seen the deaths of many, and a couple of times come close to it myself. Almost all the gay men I knew in San Francisco and New York died, and many more in Seattle. So many died that I have forgotten the names. And yet, ironically, I still live. I'm pretty sure that Tom might understand how that feels. He's one of the few left who could.
