

## Swimming Inside the Sun

As I often mention here, I'm a big fan of the intersection of music and books. Knowing that interest, David Zweig's novel *Swimming Inside the Sun* came to me highly recommended. I'm glad it did. It's an insightful look at the creation of art and the emotional wreckage that can come from putting all of yourself into something.



*Swimming Inside the Sun* is the story of Daniel Green, a New York musician. He has an affordable Manhattan apartment, and he's received a nice advance to go along with his major label recording contract. Sounds great. There is a rub – and it is a big one. After fighting every step of the way to make the album that he wanted to create, the way he wanted it created, things change at the label. The suits no longer want to release, promote, market or otherwise spend another moment (or dollar) more on his creation. They've canned his album and contract. Also: they won't let him have the recordings, because they paid for them.

With money enough to live on – for a while anyway – and having been royally screwed on his big break, Daniel's ambitions to do much of anything dry up. Thus begins a cycle of destructive inward reflection and emotional/creative paralysis.

Daniel begins to jot ever increasingly complex notes to himself on yellow post-it notes that he begins to affix to his walls. He can't bring himself to touch his guitar – or do much of anything else really – except think, watch TV, and write notes to himself.

The novel features a brilliant scene that was funny in a humorous train wreck sort of way. Daniel becomes so inward looking that the “noise” of the outside world finally makes him snap. He makes a sign that says “shut up!” He then walks around New York City holding the sign up to random people on the street, cell phone users, Apple advertisements – the noise of the modern world. This experiment does not end well for Daniel. Whether or not Daniel can pull himself out of this downward spiral creates the tension of the novel, and I'm not telling.

Getting inside someone like Daniel's mind can make for challenging reading at times. There are more than a few authorial asides, expository bursts, and extended internal dialogues. Daniel, at least, seems aware of this:

You f\*cking bastards. You demand action. You protest: When are things going to happen? Where's the thrust, the suspense, the plot unfurling like a red carpet unrolling for the Queen? No more thoughts! No more authorial asides, expository bursts, extended internal dialogues!

Some may be put off by Daniel's endless introspection, but I think it is a necessary part of the story. One other minor quibble: I lost an afternoon after a reference to the **Mandolin Bros.** music store on Staten Island left me browsing their “how-much-are-you-willing-to-spend” web site at length. Who walks in and buys **this**?

But I digress... *Swimming Inside the Sun* is an immersive view of the demons of creativity. I found it to be an engrossing and ultimately rewarding novel. I'd recommend it for the “Shut Up” piece alone.

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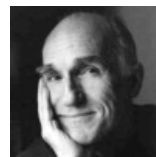
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