

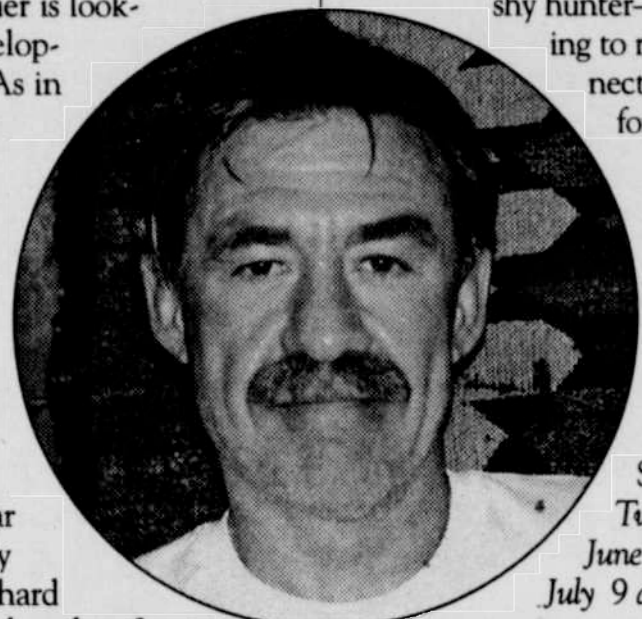
He says: "It had nothing to do with the heart or feelings; it was just, 'Let's get really fucked up and get our rocks off.' It always seemed so empty to me."

He adds: "I'm not saying that it's bad; I'm just saying that there's more. And I'm always looking for more."

One way that Spanbauer is looking for more is in the development of his spiritual life. As in his previous novel, *In the City of Shy Hunters* explores Native American mysticism and spiritual transcendence.

"I'm very interested in my relationship to the divine or whether there is a divine," he says. "When I got AIDS, the lights went off for me as far as faith went 'cause I really thought that if I believed hard enough I wouldn't get it...but then I catch myself praying."

But after 14 years of writing and the breakup of an 11-year relationship, Spanbauer



finds himself facing a blank page in both his writing and his life.

"How does a 55-year-old man with AIDS begin dating?" he asks. "All I can wish for is that somebody with a spirit will see my spirit in some way." Like the characters who populate the city in his latest novel, Spanbauer is once again a shy hunter—a mild, gentle soul yearning to reach out to make a connection and find a new place for himself in the world.

"I'm still trying to come back to life," he says. "I think I might just write a love story next." □

TOM SPANBAUER will read from *In the City of Shy Hunters* June 21 at Twenty-Third Avenue Books, June 26 at Broadway Books and July 9 at Powell's City of Books.

MARC ACITO was raised in an Italian Catholic enclave in New Jersey surrounded by morons. He is writing his first novel.

REVIEW

IN THE CITY OF SHY HUNTERS

by Tom Spanbauer. Grove/Atlantic, 2001; \$26 hardcover.

Ten years ago, Tom Spanbauer's second novel, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, slid quietly onto bookshelves, into readers' hands and onto favorite book lists across the country.

The story of a group of outcasts turned family in the mountains of Idaho at the turn of the century, it never has gone out of print. Part J.D. Salinger, part Tom Robbins, part Louis L'Amour, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon* was listed in the *Advocate* among the Top 100 Gay and Lesbian Fiction of all time.

Spanbauer's first novel, *Faraway Places*, about a curious rural Idaho boy and the volatile landscape around him, retains a cult following that keeps used copies of the out-of-print book hard to find.

Anyone expecting Spanbauer's newest, *In the City of Shy Hunters*, to be a letdown after a decade's impatient anticipation will be in for a shock. He completely has outdone himself, creating a novel of sophistication, humor and pathos to rival, if not top, his earlier novels.

William Parker arrives in New York City just as two cataclysmic monsters rear their ugly heads: society's meltdown concerning the homeless and the sudden rise of the AIDS pandemic. The novel weaves his past life growing up in the ruthless lands of Idaho with his present and mythological life in the Big Apple.

In the course of searching for forgiveness, Will collects about him an assembly of intricately drawn characters who become friends, lovers and, ultimately, co-warriors. Ruby Prestigiacomio, Charlie 2Moons, Chef Som Chai, Bobbie, The Art Family, Two Shot, Fiona, Daniel the boss's brother, Mack Dickson The Perfect Homosexual, etc.—no character is left without dimension and humanity. The ultimate center of the novel is New York City itself, portrayed with more balls-out honesty than any novel in a long, long time.

Spanbauer tells stories better than anyone around. There is an intimacy in the telling that recalls friends sitting around a campfire or around a bar table, giving up the hopes and fears of a life lived with conviction.

The first-person voice is visceral, colloquial and fully engaging. Spanbauer employs elements of magic realism with the same masterful hand he used in *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. The novel, to the bitter honest end, does not fail. Tom Spanbauer is, in fact, a most dangerous writer. Open any of his three novels with an open heart and a willing ear and you just might have your life altered.

His work barrages you like a pyroclastic flow—battering and burning like the first time you read Kurt Vonnegut or Carson McCullers or Carlos Casteneda. He is an indigenous writer—original to the ground he covers, authentic in memory.

Spanbauer writes about dangerous things—astrologically speaking, Eighth House issues like death, sex, taboo and the exchange of power. Few have the moxie to take on these topics with such frank intensity and lack of sentimentality as he does. No one else does it as beautifully and personally as he. Simultaneously eloquent and perverse, Spanbauer creates a personal form of storytelling that breaks any mold to which one wishes to assign him. Comparisons ultimately fail.

We've waited 10 years for this novel to come to press. It was damn well worth the wait. And now the only thing left to say is...encore, encore.

—Glenn Williams

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