



In the Weeds

Daniel Browne

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Daniel Browne's *In the Weeds* is set in Brooklyn, New York's famously diverse borough of neighborhoods. In recent decades, Brooklyn's status has changed; it is no longer shadowed by mighty Manhattan. Brooklyn is a destination of its own, with an ever-growing hipster, artisan, and creatively entrepreneurial community.

Will narrates. He is the youngish assistant to a New York City councilwoman, and a college graduate with an "inessential" degree and a dwindling sense of life's purpose. Seduced by a magazine called *Savory Brooklyn*, which features articles about generally tattooed bakers, beekeepers, and botanical gin makers, Will dreams of finding his own utopian Brooklyn, a land seemingly kindred to the free-spirited meccas of Portland and Seattle.

Savory Brooklyn in mind, Will and his cynical yet sage friend Elliot pursue the idea of starting an urban farm. Organic produce can be grown, school children can be healthily engaged, and the harvest can be used by local upscale restaurateurs to enhance such creations as Zoey Bechamel pizza and chickweed salad with "lemon zest, gouda, and blueberries."

In the Weeds skillfully parries Will's optimism with the realities of cash flow, public relations, permits, and competition. Mistrust towards gentrification and racial tensions are also key issues, as is New York's longstanding tendency to regard even a blighted patch of land as either gang turf or real estate. Financial anxieties exist as well, particularly when Will's wife finds herself unexpectedly pregnant. And with the novel's time frame following the 2008 economic crisis, prospects become limited. President Obama's buoyant "Yes, We Can!" campaign slogan seems reduced to "No, We Probably Shouldn't."

Witty, wry, and engaging, *In the Weeds* takes an enjoyably satirical view of New Brooklyn while still maintaining a sense of possibility about how, with both initiative and balance, urban landscapes can change for the better.

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