



Panic Years

Daniel DiFranco

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Daniel DiFranco's intimate novel *Panic Years* follows a twelve-week tour of everywhere-but-nowhere, through tiny clubs, on filthy stages, and across long stretches of highway.

Life as a gigging musician is rough. Twenty-eight-year-old Paul, who's been playing bass with obscure indie bands for a decade, hits the road again with a new band, Qualia. Paul, though in a state of suspended adolescence, is painfully aware that he's getting older in a business obsessed with young talent. Life outside of the tour van races by as he carries his own gear and trades drink tickets with his bandmates.

Qualia, a charming collection of quirky misfits, includes Laney, Jeff, and Gooch. Their characterizations skirt the edges of well-worn stereotypes. Laney, doing double duty as the band's manager, is a "Yoko" whose sex appeal changes the group's dynamic. Jeff, on hiatus from his cocaine habit, has switched to alarming quantities of booze. Surly, salty Gooch is too responsible for his own good. Drix, a friend from Paul's past, joins the group as well, adding a rock-and-roll element and a predictably tragic outcome.

Paul is the oldest, longest-working musician in the group; he is jaded, but his perspective is also laughably immature. He sneers at others' youthfulness while failing to see the consequences of his own inability to grow up. Twenty-nine may *feel* old after a decade of dive bars, but it is far from adulthood. *Panic Years* is at its best when it lingers in the moments that evaporate from memory as soon as they're experienced, from bickering about whether The Pixies are any good to ridiculous jokes and the music industry's urban legends.

Panic Years is authentic, bighearted, and fun. The novel's tight pacing and uncynical approach to its subject matter capture the essence of a young group on the road—a trip to be savored, one gritty gig at a time.

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