

The Invisible

Seb Doubinsky

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In Seb Doubinsky's dystopian novel *The Invisible*, politics are the only game in town.

Georg is appointed as the commissioner of New Babylon, a large metropolis where politics, corporations, and journalism merge to form a monolithic uberculture. He begins his new job just as a presidential race ramps up, its candidates caricatures (the incumbent president is liberal and platitudinous; she faces a challenger who's rich and xenophobic); as a drug called Synth wreaks havoc; and as random poets and artists are murdered.

The book first details how hollow life is within this monoculture, even as Georg is coerced into investigating Synth and politics, which are so all-consuming that individual people become boring. Georg's wife is a teacher, but she considers it her job to organize political protests and post them on YouTube. The couple spends their evenings absorbing political television shows, their conversations reduced to an ongoing debate over whether or not to get a cat. Georg lavishes more attention on pouring whiskey than on any other activity; his descriptions of cold ice mingling with booze are joyful.

Georg's investigation of Synth progresses. Seen as a "political drug" because it makes people want to escape the culture, its origins are undetermined. There are convincing suggestions that Synth represents a deep state operation led by one or both presidential campaigns, though a bookstore owner claims that Synth materializes from the *zeitgeist* instead.

Brief, staccato chapters sparkle with surprising twists, though the Synth and murder subplots are restrained. Though Georg finally realizes that he's just another bear in the circus, he is content with his role. In the stark novel *The Invisible*, life is smothered by a mutually parasitic culture.

SUSAN WAGGONER (May / June 2020)

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