

## The Naive Guys: A Memoir of Friendship, Love and Tech in the Early 1990s

**Harry Patz Jr.**

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*Authenticity and romanticism highlight this endearing coming-of-age novel set in the nineties.*

The debut novel from MBA Harry Patz Jr., *The Naive Guys*, is a postcollegiate coming-of-age tale set amid the early nineties tech boom. It is a nostalgic and detailed account of a young man coming into his own.

Mark graduates from Boston College with a great group of friends and no idea what he's going to do with his life. Initially, he falls back on his family in New York, where he stays with his mother, uncle, and soon-to-be-married sister. But a stroke of luck lands him at a burgeoning tech company, Fishsoft, where he learns the ins and outs of software sales and finds ways to fund a still-raucous postcollege nightlife with his buddies.

Absent central conflicts, the novel essentially follows Mark as he navigates his turbulent postcollege years and settles into the realities of encroaching adulthood. Though he and his friends, most notably coworker Sally, spend a lot of time plotting their next sexual conquests, there's a gentleness to Mark that charms: he's the guy who buys his maybe-girlfriend roses when she seems down, who rushes to his mother's bedside, who takes up the slack for his sister's fiancé. Interspersed with meditations on what kind of blow job the ideal woman should give—"I don't want a blow job queen kissing my kids!" insists Mark's selectively principled friend Kostas—such qualities emphasize both relative innocence and his youthful vigor. Patz builds complexity into his characters well.

The preponderance of side trips into the world of platinum-blond strippers, irresistible girls who send mixed signals, and heated sports events plant the novel firmly in dude territory, though Mark's interminable searches for something more will also hold interest for a broader readership.

There's an occasional romanticism to Mark's reflections on the past that affords the novel further depth. "That year in August, I was living in purgatory, mourning the past but not yet being able to visualize the future. It felt almost cruel to smell that whiff of my beloved autumn," he writes in one lovelorn passage.

The novel has its flaws—terms like "worrywart" feel out of place in the mouths of its young men, Mark's need to relate everyone he encounters to actors from television and film sometimes becomes trying, and the book can veer into overly descriptive territory. That the novel begins with an out-of-sequence scene that never renders a greater revelation is a source of confusion. Still, there's an authenticity to Mark's search for a personal center that will carry the readership through. For all the frenzy of its characters' lives and work, the laid-back quality to the novel's progression proves endearing.

An intelligent novel that follows a young man on the rise through his early twenties toward probable adulthood, *The Naive Guys* is certain to strike notes, both sympathetic and reminiscent, with readers on all steps of the journey.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (October 6, 2014)

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