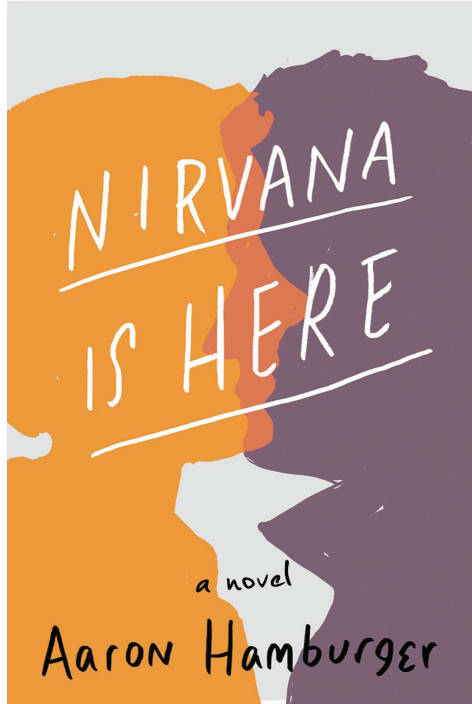


# NIRVANA IS HERE

A NOVEL

## AARON HAMBURGER

FEATURED FOR  
SPRING  
2019  
ON SALE  
MAY 14



*“Like everything Hamburger writes, **NIRVANA IS HERE** is compulsively readable, charming, and suffused with deep humanity. The title is truth in advertising, folks: this novel is nirvana indeed.”*  
—Elisa Albert, author, *After Birth*

Have you ever searched for your high school crush online? Two decades after they first met, Medieval Historian Ari Silverman is reconnecting with his high school obsession Justin Jackson, now happily married to a woman and the first African-American CEO of a successful dating website. While preparing to see Justin again, Ari recalls his relationship with Justin in the segregated suburbs of Detroit during the early 1990s and the secrets they still share. At the same time, he’s also grappling with the fate of his ex-husband, a colleague accused of sexually harassing a student. Ultimately the two stories converge, and Ari comes to a fateful decision about his past and present, his life and his inner character.

Framed by the meteoric rise and fall of the band Nirvana and the me-too movement, *Nirvana is Here* touches on issues of identity, race, sex, and family with both poignancy and unexpected humor, with the sensuality and haunting nostalgia of Andre Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name* with the raw emotion of Kurt Cobain’s songwriting.

#### MARKETING POINTS:

- A novel that grapples with many issues of today, including bullying and teenage sexual assault, the me-too movement, dating apps, racism, and fluid sexual identity.
- Author Aaron Hamburger is the award-winning author of two notable books: the short story collection *The View from Stalin’s Head* (Random House; winner, Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters), and the novel *Faith for Beginners* (Random House).
- Hamburger’s writing appears frequently in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Poets & Writers*, *Tin House*, and more.
- Author signings and galley giveaway at national ALA conferences and regional LGBTQ conferences
- In-store appearances scheduled for New York, Baltimore, Annapolis, Washington, D.C. and more

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Photo: © DC Event Photo

**AARON HAMBURGER** is the author of the short story collection *The View from Stalin’s Head* (Random House)—winner of the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters—and the novel *Faith for Beginners* (Random House), was a Lambda Literary Award nominee. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *O*, *the Oprah Magazine*, *Details*, and more. He has been awarded fellowships from Yaddo, Djerassi, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and the Edward F. Albee Foundation, as well as first prize in the Dornstein Contest for Young Jewish Writers. He has taught creative writing at Columbia University, the George Washington University, New York University, Brooklyn College, and the Stonecoast MFA Program. He currently resides in Washington, D.C.

## HIGH PRAISE FOR *NIRVANA IS HERE*

“Like everything Hamburger writes, *NIRVANA IS HERE* is compulsively readable, charming, and suffused with deep humanity. The title is truth in advertising, folks: this novel is nirvana indeed.” —**Elisa Albert, author, *After Birth***

## PAST PRAISE FOR AARON HAMBURGER

### for the novel *Faith for Beginners*

“Consistently amusing, particularly when Hamburger offers barbed observations about the banalities of tourist culture.” —***The New York Times***

“A knockout of a novel.” —***Frontiers Magazine*** (chosen as one of the top five books of 2005)

“A hilarious spin on the ancient travel-as-self-discovery formula.” —***Newsday***

“Highly recommended for anyone who is drawn to stories of family affected by the global political context of everyday life.” —***Booklist***

“Hamburger goes further than witty satire . . . When the plot takes a dark turn he demonstrates that he’s capable of taking on global issues.” —***Publishers Weekly***

### for the short story collection *The View from Stalin’s Head*

“The stuff of a Czech fairy tale.” —***The New York Times Book Review***

“Laugh-out-loud funny.” —***Los Angeles Times***

“In language that’s both understated and visceral, Hamburger skillfully distills those moments when his characters experience crucial identity shifts.” —***Booklist***

“Both understated and visceral, Hamburger skillfully distills those moments when his characters experience crucial identity shifts.” —***Publishers Weekly***

PHOTO: DC EVENT PHOTO



## ABOUT AARON HAMBURGER

AARON HAMBURGER's first book, the short story collection *The View from Stalin's Head* (Random House) was awarded the Rome Prize by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His second book, the novel *Faith for Beginners* (Random House) was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award. His fiction, essays, and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Poets and Writers*, *Details*, *Tin House*, *Tablet*, *The Forward*, *Boulevard*, *Subtropics*, *Crazyhorse*, and many others. He has been a resident at the Edward F. Albee Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Yaddo, and Djerassi. He taught creative writing at Columbia University, New York University, and the Brooklyn College MFA Program. He currently resides in Washington, D.C.

## ABOUT THREE ROOMS PRESS

Three Rooms Press is a fierce New York-based independent publisher inspired by dada, punk, and passion. Founded in 1993, it serves as a leading independent publisher of cut-the-edge creative, including fiction, memoir, poetry translations, drama and art. In addition, Three Rooms Press produces and promotes a variety of literary and cultural events worldwide, including readings, plays, workshops, and concerts.

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# THE MAKING OF *NIRVANA IS HERE*

by Aaron Hamburger

*NIRVANA IS HERE* is the story I've been writing or trying to write my entire life.

Like the protagonist of the book, I grew up in the segregated suburbs of Detroit, though in the 1980s, not the 1990s, and like the protagonist, I felt very much like an outsider. I remember vividly being a freshman in college in the fall of 1991, sitting on the floor of a friend's dorm room, when another student came running in, saying, "You have to hear this song" and putting on "Smells Like Teen Spirit" by Nirvana. The song felt so different from anything I'd heard before, and it felt in a way like a kind of permission to be who I was, to claim an identity I'd been running away from for so long in my life.

When I was twelve, I was sexually assaulted by another boy my age, a neighborhood bully who threatened to kill me if I told anyone what he'd done. His threat notwithstanding, I did tell my therapist, who was legally obligated to tell the police. I remember vividly sitting in the police station and being asked if I "wanted it," which was my assailant's defense for what he'd done. Because I said no, both to that boy and the police, I was safe. This led me to the wrongheaded conclusion that if I admitted to anyone that I was attracted to other guys, he would be found innocent and I would be found guilty, and my assailant would be set free and could come find me and exact his revenge.

All this is the background material that inspired the fictionalized version of the story of this book. It's material that for many years, even as an adult, I felt that I had to keep hidden, that somehow others would feel repelled if they knew the truth. In my earlier fiction, I've written semi-autobiographical stories, but always with this key fact of my own life erased or shunted off to the side. This book is the first time I've attempted to grapple with this subject matter head-on, and it's been liberating. Suddenly, I feel as though my fiction has taken on a new sense of vitality and honesty that's liberated me to tell all kinds of stories, not just my own.

I recently wrote an autobiographical essay about this time in my life, which appeared in *Tin House* magazine, called "Sweetness Mattered." In the piece, I describe my sexual assault and then how at a new school, I met another boy I liked, to whom I was afraid to confess my true feelings, feeling that at the time, I didn't fully understand. I found out that he liked a certain kind of candy, and I began bringing him a piece of that candy every day to school—for three years. The gesture felt therapeutic. Even though nothing romantic ever resulted, our budding friendship had a curative effect on me, made me feel as if I weren't the image of myself that the boy who'd assaulted me wanted me to believe.

When the essay came out, I was shocked by the overwhelming response to it. I had no idea that this part of myself that I'd kept hidden was exactly what people were interested in knowing about me.

In high school, I also discovered that I had an interest and talent in tennis and in painting and drawing. Becoming proficient at both of these also helped me find myself and move toward healing.

Perhaps the strangest part of this whole experience has been that though many of these events are very much in the past in terms of time, in terms of psychic effect they have stayed with me and to a certain extent shaped me. For that reason, I've written this story as a braided narrative, with the past story framed by the present, just as fragments of my past have stayed on my mind in my own present life.

As I said earlier, I feel as though I've been writing this book in some form or another my entire life, but it wasn't until the past few years that it occurred to me to shape this material into a single, coherent story, in the form of a novel. Recent political and cultural events regarding the #metoo movement post-dated much of the generative writing process, but as I was completing this book, knowing that other people in my situation were telling their stories gave me courage and inspired me to bring my book across the finish line. In fact, I read several survivor's stories and psychology books dealing with these issues, and I was shocked by the sense of recognition I experienced as I read all these accounts.