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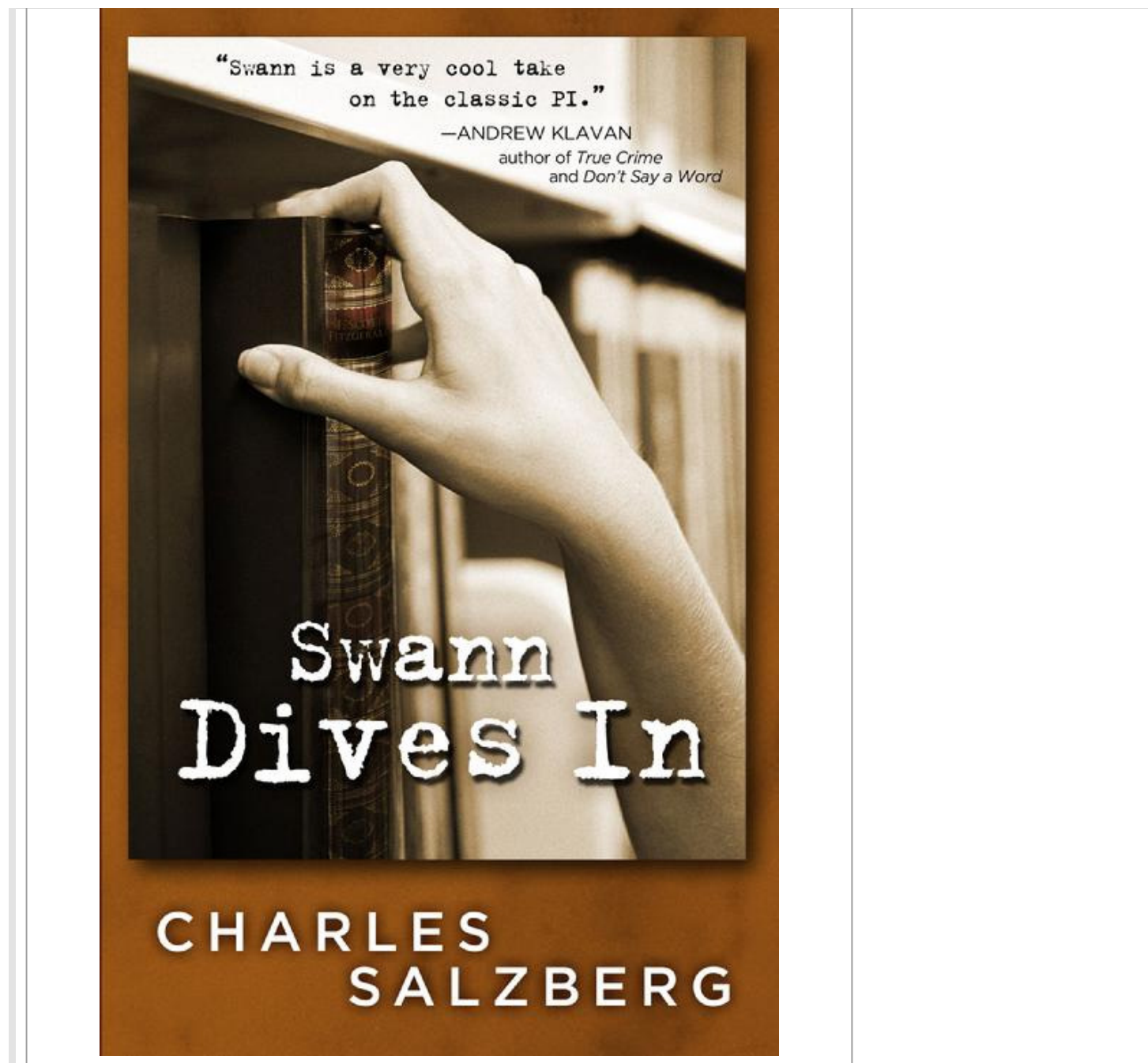
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The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review- Hot off the Presses



Cover Image of Swann Dives In by Charles Salzberg

Author Bio: Charles Salzberg is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Esquire*, *GQ*, *New York Magazine* and the *New York Times*. His first novel, *Swann's Last Song*, was nominated for a Shamus Award for Best First PI Novel. He has been a Visiting Professor of Magazine at S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, and he teaches at the Writer's Voice and the New York Writers Workshop, where he is a Founding Member. His latest novel, *Swann Dives In* will be available October 19th.

***The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review Presents:
Swann Dives In by Charles Salzberg***

Review~

In Charles Salzberg's latest novel, *Swann Dives In*, protagonist Henry Swann has foresworn his former occupation of finding lost persons in order to find himself at forty-six years old. He takes a job as a cable repairman, intent on being someone people wish to see, someone who will bring them peace of mind in the fashion of restoring connections so that they can return to their beloved programs that take the edge off of their day-to-day realities. Yet as with all true callings, the work that is his passion and defines a part of who he is won't be denied. It beckons in the form of a seemingly innocuous request from an old friend and bail bondsman, Jake Stein. Swann doesn't know just how deeply he's going to be thrust back into his old life, but the allure of his true purpose, bringing order to chaos, sets him on the fast track to accepting what he's best at, and, for better or worse, what he loves doing.

A distinguishing trait of Salzberg's novel is the highly significant internal dialogue that allows for keen insights into Swann's character. We get a bird's eye view of his ingrained personal traits and a feeling for every step of his struggles with accepting who and what he is:

While I was in the midst of giving this little speech an odd thing was happening. I was getting an adrenaline rush, a rush I hadn't had in over three years. It was introduced as a tingling sensation that coursed through my entire body, not unlike the lactic acid that attacked me when I climbed stairs, but much more pleasant. I wondered, did I really miss all this? The thrill of the hunt, the ecstasy of the capture? Was this possible? Please, God, no... I did not want to be drawn back into a life of uncertainty, a life that too often made no sense. And so, instead of enjoying the feeling, I fought it. (27)

Through the initial charade by Stein, Swann is put in touch with Carlton Phillips; a composed, powerful and wealthy attorney whose daughter, Marcy, has disappeared with an older boyfriend, Sean Loomis, that isn't the sort that Phillips would approve of. In the course of their initial conversation staged during a baseball game, both men present their seemingly immovable positions and Swann gives a revealing statement about why he chose to leave his profession of being a skip tracer in the first place. It is this outlook that, despite his eventual return to this work, follows through the book even until the uncertain end:

Because I got tired of knocking my head against a wall. Because certain long and closely held personal and professional values that were the cornerstone of my existence suddenly went up in smoke. Because the world isn't rational, Mr. Phillips. It's chaotic and hostile and illogical and messy and downright confusing. And when you get right down to it, nothing matters very much but the here and now. I found that sometimes it's better to let what's lost stay lost. (38)

In reading the initial chapters, there are many foreshadowing hints in Swann's internal and external dialogues that set the tone for the rest of the book and come to powerfully resonate to a deeper extent once all is said and done.

Accepting his fate, Swann embarks on the case to find Marcy Phillips and this search will take him from the reliable complexity

of New York City to the less predictable regions of the collegiate atmosphere in upstate New York in Part II, to Boston in Part III, back to New York City in Part IV, across the sea to London in Part V and finally, Part VI lands squarely back in New York City with a slew of unanswered questions. Colorful characters imbue the academic literary environment; a tenured professor, a coy librarian, rare book dealers with hidden angles. Few people are what they seem to be and the intriguing world of rare books is being used as a vehicle for deceit and revenge.

A coveted but missing first edition of *Tender is the Night* bears an inscription which may or may not be authentic, but if it is, could change the perception of pivotal literary figures. An auction towards the end of the book has the edition returned to Phillips, the original owner, but for a price; a dealing which could have been orchestrated by his daughter as a blow to answer for the supposed traumatic injuries he dealt her earlier in life. Marcy, however, appears as no victim, but rather a cold, cunning character who uses people for her own purposes. Swann remains full of questions and yet doesn't seek to tie up loose ends or uncover motives because as he stated earlier in the novel, "...the world isn't rational... It's chaotic and hostile and illogical and messy and downright confusing. And when you get right down to it, nothing matters very much but the here and now." His last action is deleting a cell phone picture of his former office; he just might stick to his calling, but the way of the past, and even perhaps his expectations of how life is supposed to work, is the past.

Swann Dives In is a thoughtful mystery with a sprinkling of literary allusions, the true-to-life qualities of the questions that go unanswered and a driving protagonist that is, through all his personal revelations which the reader gets to be privy to, an 'endearing character' (as he was referred to by Joy Behar, co-host of *The View*).



[Excerpt from Swann Dives In by Charles Salzberg](#)

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