

## John Darnielle

### Topics

Best Selling and Award Winning Authors, Culture and Society

### Travels From

North Carolina

### Bio

John Darnielle is a musician and writer, best known for being the founder and core member of the indie folk group the Mountain Goats. His debut novel, *Wolf in White Van*, circuitously tracks the journey of a lonely southern Californian named Sean Phillips. In the wake of a disfiguring injury at the age of seventeen, Phillips indulges in various fantastic adventures and develops Trace Italian, a text-based, role-playing game played through the mail. Players are allowed to navigate a toxic, dystopic version of America, but the game no longer remains harmless fun when a couple of teens in Florida decide to take their play into the real world. Released to critical acclaim in September 2014, *Wolf in White Van* was longlisted for the National Book Award for fiction the same month. *The New York Times* praised the “strange and involving...richly imagined” book and proclaimed that “[Darnielle] has an instinctive understanding of fetid teenage emotional states.” His most recent novel, *Universal Harvester*, was released in February 2017. In the world of music, John has been recognized for his book-smart lyrics by *Time*, *New York* magazine, and countless outlets, while *The New Yorker* dubbed him “America’s best non-hip-hop lyricist.” His band the Mountain Goats began as a series of lo-fi recordings in a studio

apartment in Norwalk, California, where he played an acoustic guitar and set some of his poetry to the music. From 1994 to 2000, the Mountain Goats put out five full-length albums and innumerable EPs, singles, and cassette releases. These recordings are marked by the intimacy of the lo-fi production and John's conceptually daring, literate lyrics. In 2001, the Mountain Goats signed to prestigious indie label 4AD and released their first studio-recorded album *Tallahassee* the following year. The record explores the relationship of a couple whose lives were the subject of the song cycle known as the Alpha Series. Now committed to a full-band, hi-fi recording approach, the Mountain Goats released a string of critically acclaimed and commercially successful LPs, including *We Shall All Be Healed*, *The Sunset Tree*, *Get Lonely*, and *Beat the Champ*. In addition to the auditory changes heard on these albums, John took an autobiographical approach to some of his lyrics, which included chronicling his abusive childhood for *The Sunset Tree*. John Darnielle has collaborated and toured with a number of notable musicians along the way, including John Vanderslice, Owen Pallett, Kaki King, and more. It was during a 2007 tour that the current incarnation of the group solidified: John on vocals, guitar, and keys; Peter Hughes on bass and backing vocals; and Jon Wurster of influential indie rock group Superchunk on drums. Their latest record, *Goths*, was released in May 2017.

## SPEECHES

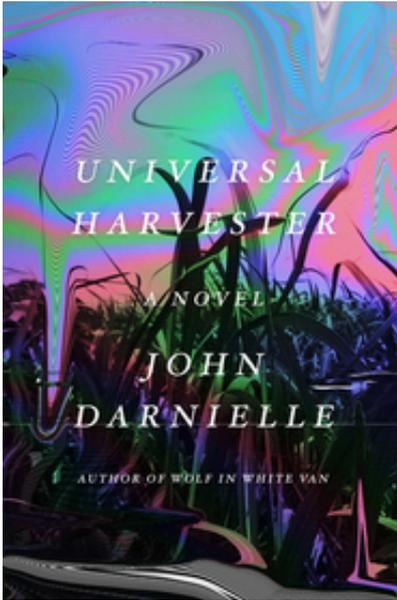
**Four Burners Going** John started off writing poetry, shifted his focus to writing songs, and eventually penned a bestselling, critically acclaimed novel. In this talk, he reveals how he works within multiple mediums and how to deal with the perception of being seen as one type of artist embarking on a new creative venture.

**Vision of the Lake Bottom** Some of John's lyrics and prose are both beautiful and heartbreaking: there are the tales of drug-addicted friends that populate the album *We Shall All Be Healed*; the chronicles of his childhood and abusive stepfather in *The Sunset Tree*; and the interior musings of the solitary, disfigured narrator in *Wolf in White Van*. John sheds light on how he mines the topics of loneliness, isolation, powerlessness, mental illness, and other painful concepts to create something stunning and transcendent.

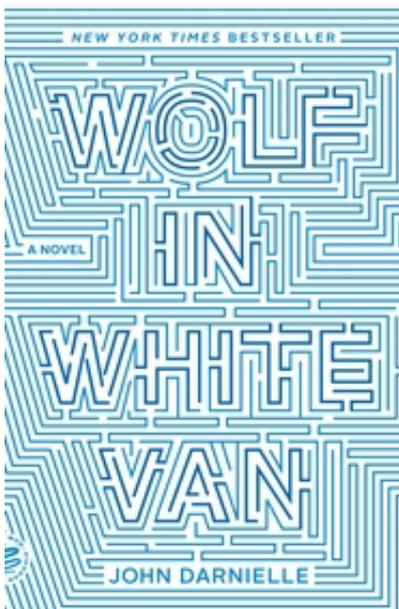
**You're Just the Cook** As interviews and articles have illustrated, John Darnielle's cultural influences are extremely diverse, ranging from the verbal pyrotechnics of novelist William Gass to the notable Marvel heroes of the late '70s comics, and from horror classic films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Bride of Frankenstein* to classical composers like Mahler and Scriabin. John explores how all art shares a common origin and all artistic ambition merits equal honor.

## BOOKS

[Universal Harvester](#) A Novel



Hardcover



Hardcover

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Jeremy works at the Video Hut in Nevada, Iowa. But a couple of odd customer complaints will take Jeremy and those around him deeper into the Iowa landscape than they have ever expected to go. They will become part of a story that unfolds years into the past and years into the future, part of an impossible search for something someone once lost that they would do anything to regain.

[Wolf in White Van](#) A Novel

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Welcome to Trace Italian, a game of strategy and survival! You may now make your first move. Isolated by a disfiguring injury since the age of seventeen, Sean Phillips crafts imaginary worlds for

strangers to play in. From his small apartment in southern California, he orchestrates fantastic adventures where possibilities, both dark and bright, open in the boundaries between the real and the imagined. As the creator of Trace Italian—a text-based, role-playing game played through the mail—Sean guides players from around the world through his intricately imagined terrain, which they navigate and explore, turn by turn, seeking sanctuary in a ravaged, savage future America.

#### REVIEWS: Praise for *Wolf in White Van*:

“The novel’s emotional range is narrow but deep...what drives *Wolf in White Van* is Mr. Darnielle’s uncanny sense of what it’s like to feel marginalized, an outsider, a freak. He has an instinctive understanding of fetid teenage emotional states and the ‘timelines of meaningless afternoons that ended somewhere big and terrible.’”

—The New York Times

“Darnielle is a master at building tenderness from this unspecified grief. *Wolf* is about the way storytelling can deliver you, though not always save you, from the blistering, profound pain of adolescence – or just existence.”

—NPR

“The book is not the kind of rallying cry or dark comfort that Mountain Goats fans are used to, but a complex meditation—partially about the potential costs of those very cries and comforts. Like Darnielle’s songwriting, the prose is often cryptic and then stunningly clear, microscopically specific and then audaciously grand. The words soothe for sentences at a time, then strike with blunt force.”

—Slate

“John Darnielle’s novel moves through the mind like a dark-windowed car through a sleepy neighborhood: quiet, mysterious, menacing, taking you places you will never, never get out of your head.”

—Daniel Handler

“The acclaimed lyricist has quickly become a skillful writer of fiction...*Wolf in White Van* is an intricately twisted book Darnielle pulls off with the easy confidence of an experienced novelist.”

—Chicago Reader

“*Wolf in White Van* is utterly magnificent. I was surprised and moved and amazed page after page after page. I am talking about audible gasp type stuff, and also deeper, interior gasps of reflection and

astonishment and gratitude. This story is a hard and beautiful human puzzle that will be a pleasure to solve and resolve over many readings.”

—John Hodgman