

## KUNKEL'S CAULFIELD

BY **LAUREN KIRSCHNER**

DECEMBER 22, 2005 12:00 AM



Indecision: A NOVEL By Benjamin Kunkel (Random House), 241 pages, \$29.95 cloth. Rating: **NNNN** Rating: **NNNN**



Dwight Wilmerding, Indecision's earnest but deeply confused narrator, is like a hamster trying to scale the wall of a glass aquarium.

At 28, he feels trapped in his work and relationships, yet can't seem to do anything to improve them. As a 20-something myself, I've come to accept that standing in front of 30 kinds of salad dressing in the grocery store produces an exaggerated response - panic in the midst of plenty, let's call it. In Benjamin Kunkel's coming-of-age story, psychic paralysis, what the existentialists call angst, gets medicalized: Wilmerding is diagnosed with "abulia," the pathological inability to make decisions.

Indecision riffs on the inability of the armchair philosopher (for Wilmerding it's the desk chair - he works in tech support for pharma giant Pfizer) to tease out the complexities of global social unrest. But his life begins to improve when he gets a prescription for Abulinix, a drug to combat, yes, abulia.

His first decision as a cured man is to take a trip to Ecuador to track down a long-lost crush from prep school. Thus begins Wilmerding's odyssey across both the Amazonian jungle and that of his own psychology. Girls veer in and out of his life as if on swinging vines. Love and political awareness come into Wilmerding's life slowly, as his fog of indecision is replaced by full-fledged social consciousness.

Indecision is all about the journey, and Kunkel's prose is rhapsodically honest and moving. Alternating between hilarious self-searching and uncomfortable pining, Dwight Wilmerding is a socialist Holden Caulfield who dares to leave New York City and take a good hard look at himself from afar.

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