



A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard: A Novel in Three Parts

Hideo Levy, Christopher Scott

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A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard is the highly acclaimed, moving debut of Levy Hideo (also known as Ian Hideo Levy), a white American author living in Japan who writes fiction and nonfiction in Japanese. Set against the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, which include student protests against the Vietnam War and the U.S.-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty (AMPO), the novel tells the story of Ben Isaac, a blond-haired, blue-eyed American youth living with his father at the American consulate in Yokohama. Chafing against his father's strict authority and the cultural trappings of an America that grows more and more remote, Ben flees his home to live with Ando, his Japanese friend. Refusing to speak English with Ben, Ando shows the young American the way to Shinjuku, the epicenter of Japan's countercultural movement and the closest Ben has every felt to home.

As Ben struggles to understand the full contours of his identity, Levy's coming-of-age novel offers an eloquent elegy to a lost time. From the vantage point of a privileged and alienated "outsider" (*gaijin*), *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard* beautifully captures a heady, eventful moment in Japanese history. Ben's experiences virtually recreate Levy's own youth. Wandering the streets of Shinjuku, Ben can barely decipher the signs around him or make sense of the sounds that reach his ears. Eventually, the symbols and sensations take root, disproving the common assumption that foreigners can never really know Japanese language and culture. Through Ben's explorations, both he and the author break free from English and the constraints of being a "gaijin." Ben's character plays a leading role in each of the book parts: "A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard," "The End of November," and "One of the Guys."

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