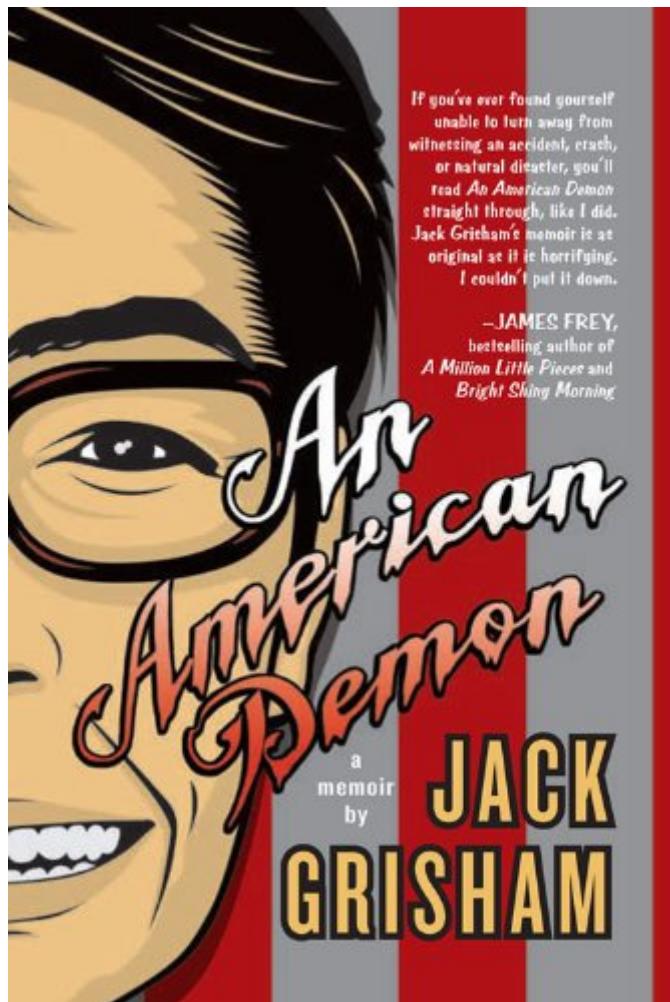


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An American Demon: A Memoir



Synopsis

Depravity, redemption, terror, and spiritual deliverance abound in this physically and psychologically complex memoir from the front man of the pioneer punk band True Sounds of Liberty (TSOL). Spanning the extremes between hard-core punk memoir and handbook for recovery and survival, this narrative documents a youth rebellion that changed the world and offered life lessons rooted in 1980s punk culture. At times unsettling and violent, this book is doused in aggression, rebellion, alcoholism, and drug abuse, culminating in tough lessons of sobriety and absolution. This captivating, dark, and ultimately redemptive life story will fascinate fans of punk and resonate with those who have suffered from addiction issues.

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Customer Reviews

I'm embarrassed to admit that I had a hard time with this book. TSOL was one of my favorite bands when I got into the scene in 1982, and for the past 10 years or so one of my favorite things has been reading punk rock oral histories and biographies, auto or otherwise. When I found out Jack Grisham had written a book I figured it would be a no-brainer. It's not unusual for one to take me

several weeks to finish, because I tend to pick at them here and there rather than read it all in one go. This one was a unique case, though. American Demon took me almost two years to finish. Between the author/narrator's in-your-face arrogance, the literally horrifying subject matter, and the fact that I couldn't tell if I was expected to take everything he said to be true or if at least some of it was supposed to be obviously fictional, I found much of the book to be off-putting. I don't know how many times I went back and looked at the front cover to confirm once again that, yep, it says "A memoir" right there, plain as day. But then I'd re-read the page 1 disclaimer saying "If you want facts, go read my police records" or something to that effect. I would go months without touching it. I'd put it down intending to come back soon, but instead I'd end up gradually piling other books and stuff on top of it and only stumble across it ages later. "Oh yeah... I need to finish this." Jack Grisham has always had a reputation for f***ing with people, but some of the stuff in this book made me clutch my pearls. To be clear, ~NOTHING~ makes me clutch my pearls. It's not far from being a non-fiction version of *A Clockwork Orange*. In fact it may even be worse, since we have no way of knowing the fate of some of the victims in the story. I witnessed and took part in plenty of hell raising in my days in the scene, but... damn. I couldn't reconcile it with the Jack I knew (as an old fan who's read and seen a lot of interviews going way back to early issues of *Flipside*, I mean... I don't know the man personally.) It wasn't until I happened across a video on *Youtube* from 2011 where Jack discusses the book that I came to understand, with great relief, where he was actually coming from and what he was going for. (And he clarified that as far as he's concerned all of the events are true, though he did move some around chronologically, and he changed some names.) After that, I was able to appreciate it a lot more and I plowed through the rest of it with no trouble. Ironically, if I had just stuck with it until I reached the final few chapters, that would have solved the issue too. Talk about a character arc. It's a great book and a hell of a ride, I just had no idea what I was getting into.

An *American Demon* was stunning like an electric shock. It was not the narrative memoir I expected. Although it did give me a look inside the southern California '80s Punk scene, it was more of a twisted maze that led me into the center of my own dark heart. At times I could barely read the next sentence, yet the whole time I was reading it I felt irritated by anything that got between me and the next page. Sometimes I slammed the book and felt sick, sometimes I bit my fingernails and felt like a naughty voyeur. And yet....Jack Grisham skillfully led me along, because when he turned suddenly and shone the mirror on me, he pierced me to the core. If by page 294, you have not seen your own demon face, sleep.

As someone on the fringes of the punk scene back in the day, I only saw TSOL once--at an abandoned warehouse near the Salt Lake City airport in 1982. Jack was quite the figure on stage back then--tall (especially in his purple creepers), menacing, whirling about, gesticulating wildly... Little did I know what his life was actually comprised of. He's called this book a "memoir of selfishness;" that's putting it mildly (as all our lives could be called that). There's real pathology here--not of Ted Bundy's nor of Jeffery Dahmer's stripe, but Jack was at least a distant relative. Despite being a practicing psychologist, I found myself feeling a bit more sullen than usual, a bit more cynical about humanity while reading his narrative, but I also couldn't stop reading. Like the proverbial train-wreck, I couldn't look away. However, I also cared about him; I wanted redemption for him. Make no mistake: what Jack deals with doesn't just go away. It's the work of a lifetime (or indeed many lifetimes, if viewed from an eastern perspective) to make substantial progress toward diminishing one's ego, and Jack's ego is of gargantuan proportions. But I want to believe such a thing is possible, because that means there's hope for any of us. I hesitated giving the book five stars because I couldn't really say I "loved" a book like this. Though often painful to read, Jack's to be commended for the honesty of his depiction, and his engaging prose. His literary conceit of writing from the perspective of a demon was creative and intriguing (ala C.S. Lewis's "Screwtape"). This book provides something rare: an honest look inside the life of someone dealing with psychopathic personality who's also trying to become a better person. Good luck, Jack. I hope the very best for you and yours.

As a fan of TSOL, I thought I would enjoy this book. I used the whispersync for voice narration by the author too. Although I understand the punk ethos, I found Mr. Grisham's humor and narration quite patronizing "maybe it would have been better without the narration.?" I couldn't finish the book. Maybe that means a poser. I would however recommend his book "A Principle of Recovery: "

Jack Grisham was a pretty screwed up young guy. But it's not his fault - life dealt him a pretty screwed up hand. Nevertheless, it's amazing how cruel he could be. The story of how he nearly drowned the innocent little neighbor kid in the pool just for kicks is a good example. Later he nearly drowned himself in drugs and booze and insane behavior, but somehow managed to rescue himself and in the process learned how to be a little more human. I'm glad he made it out of that mess and lived to write this book. Not for the faint of heart, but well worth reading to the end to learn that even a demon can be saved from a wasted life of addiction and hatred.

Reading this memoir is like watching an accident. You know you shouldn't watch because some images will haunt you, but it is hard to tear yourself away. Who would have known that the polite young surfer that I taught in my English class at MHS was so "busy" outside of class? Mr. Grisham's story is well-written and fast moving. I'm glad he channeled his demon side into a less destructive life style. M. Monaghan

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