



An American Demon: A Memoir

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An American Demon is Jack Grisham's story of depravity and redemption, terror and spiritual deliverance. While Grisham is best known as the raucous and provocative front man of the pioneer hardcore punk band TSOL (True Sounds of Liberty), his writing and true life experiences are physically and psychologically more complex, unsettling, and violent than those of Bret Easton Ellis and Chuck Palahniuk. Eloquently disregarding the prefabricated formulas of the drunk-to-sober, bad-to-good tale, this is an entirely new kind of life lesson: summoned through both God and demons, while settling within eighties hardcore punk culture and its radical-to-the-core (and most assuredly non-evangelical) parables, Grisham leads us, cleverly, gorgeously, between temporal violence and bigger-picture spirituality toward something very much like a path to salvation and enlightenment. An American Demon flourishes on both extremes, as a scary hardcore punk memoir and as a valuable message to souls navigating through an overly materialistic and woefully self-absorbed "me first" modern society. An American Demon conveys anger and truth within the perfect setting, using a youth rebellion that changed the world to open doors for this level of brash destruction. Told from the point of view of a seminal member of the American Punk movement — doused in violence, rebellion, alcoholism, drug abuse, and ending with beautiful lessons of sobriety and absolution — this book is as harrowing and life-affirming as anything you're ever going to read.

An American Demon: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review *An American Demon*: A Memoir for online ebook

Kenny says

The reviews below mine will more than adequately describe what I just read. A vastly different 'Any-Punk' story than the other one I finished last week, 'Violence Girl' by Alice Bag, which had a much lighter tone. The literary devices employed here work, and Jack's tale is somewhat mitigated, perhaps, by the 'Demon' analogy, but in this story it is quite effective. It's not that I felt him holding back...there's probably no way he did, statutes of limitations notwithstanding. But as is said, and as perhaps Jack might agree, you can put a bow on a pig, etc. In this case, there's no bow, and the pig is lain bare for all to roast. Not an easy tale to write, I can imagine, but living it must have been much more difficult. Understanding some of what has come for Jack in the years beyond what this partial-memoir describes, I have much greater appreciation for this chronicling, and thankfulness that Mr. Grisham is still here, and alive, to create, inspire, and otherwise continue to terrorize the world, albeit in a completely different way.

Grayson Wasteland says

most extreme life ever

catechism says

It says, on the jacket, "If you've ever found yourself unable to turn away from witnessing an accident, crash, or natural disaster, you'll read *An American Demon* straight through." And so I did. I had to put it down a few times -- it isn't a nice book, after all; Grisham wasn't a nice person -- but I didn't stay away for long. I'm not even sure it's a GOOD book, quite frankly, but I seem to have lost all perspective on what a good book even means anymore.

...let me back up. If you know anything about the early LA punk scene, you have heard stories about Jack Grisham, either about what an absolute asshole he was (by which I mean he was basically a sociopath, torturing people and killing animals and throwing people over the sides of bridges for the lulz), or about his incredible charisma. Probably both; the two things are inextricably linked. And now he has written his memoirs, sort of, except in this dissociated multiple-personality way, first-person through the eyes of a demon. That distance -- and I can see why he had to do it, because it's difficult to write this kind of stuff when it's fiction, and it's harder when it's real, so this must have been exceedingly rough going if he's reformed even a quarter as much as he claims to (I believe him, but, then again, that's his thing: you always believe him) -- sometimes makes things strange, and the demon persona gets a little pretentious sometimes. Like, he is the #1 demon. Really? You're the worst thing out there? This is deeply ugly shit, yes, but it's not even close to the worst thing out there.

Anyway. I don't know. Like I said, I couldn't put it down. Read it if you like early LA punk/hardcore, trainwrecks or amorality tales (he makes no apologies, which is another thing the demon persona allows him to do: just say what happened, without getting caught up in the morality of it, or in excuses or justifications or apologia; it is what it is, and now it's done).

Brenda Perlin says

Jack Grisham writes one hell of a book! *An American Demon: A Memoir* is disturbing, dark, and makes you feel like you need a shower just to wash off the dirt but at the same time you can't stop reading because it's his truth and it's mesmerizing, intoxicating, filthy and yet super smart. Mr. Demon takes you places you have never been, gratefully and does so with a clever hand. Written in such a way that you become disgusted with yourself for even wanting to read more but the demon has lured you in and there's no turning back.

Quote ~

"People have asked me what it feels like to be admired, to be feared, to have anything you want, any woman you want-and I'd tell them it's wonderful, satisfying and exciting. Until it stops working and then it's hell. When the flavors of life cease to be bold and enticing, and everything you love has the taste of sand-bland, heartless, unsatisfying fare. When you get to that point where you finally realize that nothing in this world will fill you, it's the pinnacle of loneliness."

Josh says

Jack Grisham was a shitty dude, on purpose. This book is filled with stories of him hurting people, robbing places, dating and marrying an underage girl. Most of it because he's a demon. But he warns you about that going into it, you know you're not getting the, "this is how the band happened and blah blah blah" story from him.

"Under the Big Black Sun" was a nice history lesson in how punk began in California and briefly touched on the people who ruined punk for them, NOFX's "Hepatitis Bathtub" also made mention of some of the violence that started to become common in the scene, "An American Demon" gives you a taste of that from the source, the frontman of Vicious Circle and T.S.O.L.

A chunk of it comes off pretty boastful, but I think that's what makes the fall as heavy as it is. There comes a time when the stories stop being about some young punk asshole running things and turn into him having to deal with the fact that he's not who he used to be and everyone knows it. I spent half the book rolling my eyes at the demon thing but once you see where it goes, I think it worked out really well.

Ken Avin says

Really good memoir of one of my "punk rock heroes". However, as they say, sometimes you find out things about your "heroes" you didn't want to know. That being said, I still enjoyed this book about Jack's life. Found out we had a lot in common in our childhood. Even the "sad parts" were good.

Clint says

Holy shit, Jack Grisham is totally fucked up. I really don't know how to describe this book, it's not even really a memoir, because he talks about himself as a literal demon, and sometimes has conversations with Satan. Unless he's schizophrenic, we have to just see this as a memoir with fiction thrown in for fun???

He also comes across as, seriously, the most unlikable guy ever. I mean not like Hitler unlikable, but like the meanest fucking dude you went to school with times 10 unlikable. Massive bully, sadist, misogynist, thief, etc etc etc. His saving graces are his crazy charisma (which also pisses you off, because you keep wondering why SUCH A FUCKING ASSHOLE gets to be the guy who also gets away with everything), his kickass story-telling ability, and, of course, being the singer of one of the best punk bands ever during their best years.

Which reminds me, if you get this book to learn more about TSOL, you'll be disappointed because he really doesn't talk much about it, TSOL is just mentioned to the side as he goes around drinking and destroying things and beating people up.

The ending of the book is also kind of like, just up in the air. OH, the demon is, what, finding a heart because he has a daughter? But not really, because there's really a lot of joy and relish in the retelling his antics in this book. Weird, stupid ending. But overall a really interesting and fun book, if you've got the stomach for such a despicable character. If more of his books appear on Kindle I'll definitely get them. I'm kind of interested to know how such a fiend ended up getting sober, which this book doesn't talk about at all.

Joel says

This is undoubtedly a horrifying story of cruelty and selfishness that will not be for everyone, but if you can stomach all the torture, depravity, violence and abuse then hey, you just might like it.

I've seen some reviews that tend to be critical about the narrative device of the 'demon' narrator and, whilst I do think at times it can seem overdone, the way in which it relates to one of the key themes/symbols of the book is magnificent. For this story is a perverted re-imagining of the Biblical tale of Job and the style of narration serves this purpose. This time God (referred to as 'The Man') and the devil ('the not-quite') make a bet on the soul of one of the devil's best men. Instead of Satan testing Job's faith and strength in the face of crushing adversity, God attempts to woo back a demon by reaching out through remorse, conscience and mere humanity. In this way, the demon is symbolic of one person's account of being totally unconnected to the world and then later feeling (dis)connected through suffering and remorse.

File under uneasy reading.

Bfg1971 says

Jack Grisham is a human piece of crap which is what made this book so fascinating to read. I was hooked within the first few pages and it kept me up at night wanting to find out what happened next. I am familiar with Mr. Grisham's work as front man of the band TSOL but knew nothing of his personal life. His life as a teen and young adult reminded me of a modern telling of Clockwork Orange. This certainly isn't for

everyone, but I couldn't put it down.

Christopher Skoczen says

Kind of a disappointment. TSOL was and still is one of my favorite bands, and as someone who spent a lot of time in the punk scene I've seen my fair share of characters, but Grisham is just unbearable. Often great artists are terrible people. In this case, Grisham's art is songwriting, not memoir. Not only he's not a pleasant person, but the book relishes in that conceit. Too bad.

Alex says

This was somewhat entertaining from front to back, but really entertaining in the middle. The beginning when he was a child and the end after Jack's punk rock career ended weren't my favorite parts. I did enjoy the middle that was chalked full of mis adventures during the TSOL years and those leading up to them and those shortly after.

The whole demon thing got old very early on. I could have done without it. But it seemed like this was Jack's way of telling his story.

The biggest thing that bummed me out was going on youtube and seeing TSOL play recently, with an overweight grandpa belting out songs he sang in his youth. It looked more like a retirement home karaoke night version of TSOL.

I guess that goes along with the point of this book, old "rockstars" like Jack just can't let go and move on with their lives, they're always looking back on the best years and trying to relive that in some way.

If you're a fan of TSOL, this can be a fun read, but also extremely depressing in the end.

Chad Byrnes says

Jack Grisham is a talented writer. However, he needs an editor. If I had to read one more elongated diatribe about how he's a demon and we're merely humans that are somehow ignorant of his incredible knowledge of the underworld, I was gonna puke. Got it, buddy, you're a real tough guy, you're craazy. And hey, I'll give Grisham credit on the demon stuff - he is an asshole. No doubt about it. Who else would punch his pregnant girlfriend in the belly, threaten kids with a sawed off shotgun and try to run people off the road at random? At 17, I would've read this book with glee, probably thinking he's a bad ass. But these days I just look at him like a psychotic dick with a testosterone problem.

Of course, that could be Grisham's point, he's confessing his worst deeds to his audience... looking for an answer within the mire of hell. And find God he does. Or redemption. Or whatever. And my hat's off to Grisham for coming out the other end a changed man. Or is he a changed man? Honestly, I couldn't tell. He's so busy bragging about his frenetic, idiotic pranks, it was hard to see any wisdom behind the words. No, I don't think he's changed much. So, he's sober, so what? Frankly, there's something very disturbing and annoying about his narrative - he seems wholeheartedly proud for his shitty behavior. He describes certain

scenarios with an over the top bravado as if his victims deserved what they got. It reminded me of Dee Dee Ramone's book which dilineates all of his bad behavior, while also excusing it with, well, they made me do it.

This is not an honest book about seeing the light. Honestly, if Grisham saw the light, or found redemption, than I really think he'd be less misogynist (he basically hates women, doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out) and I think the book would be a little more heartfelt and humble. It kind of reads like a bully's manifesto - the weak deserve to be hurt, etc. I'm not saying the guy should apologize for every deed... but I also don't think he should be like, "Then I took a gun to the dick's head and hell yeah!" kind of bs. And yeah, maybe he's too tough to feel shame or regret, maybe that's not punk rock... but acting like a fucking moronic, violent jock with bravado squirting out of every pore isn't too punk rock either.

Don't get me wrong. I enjoyed the book. It's very entertaining. But Grisham is a douchebag. And btw... I love TSOL. i am not an out of town visitor to punk rock land. I grew up w/ punk rock. It's who I am. But this is not my version of punk rock. Punk is about independence and strength of character... it's not just about violence. Violence should be worked out through punk rock... or what's the point? Violence should be investigated and analyzed. Grisham just thinks it's fucking cool to be violent. It's not. YOur an asshole, Grisham. I feel sorry for your wife and kids for living with you. And you need to write another book about redemption. Start the next one with, "I was just kidding."

Seth Mattei says

TSOL were always the exemplary great old school hardcore band to me when I was a kid, and Jack Grisham's incendiary attitude and snotty vocals were the core of that band's awesome delivery. Grisham's memoir doesn't disappoint. Its contents are as disturbing as blasting "Code Blue" on the family stereo for the first time.

This book reads like the best hardcore songs: urgent, unsettling, totally damaged, but with an undeniable heart beating in some hidden place. I was at times disgusted, offended, and driven to tears, but the strange poetic rhythm and plodding beat kept me going, and the twist at the end paid off nicely. Be warned, though: this is a hellish, dangerous ride.

Mary (BookHounds) says

This book is not for everyone. It is gritty, uncomfortable and much like a train wreck, you won't want to look away or miss a word. I just wish that there was an audio version since I think it would have been even better to hear Jack Grisham recount these tales in his own voice. Since this is labelled a memoir, I am sure that there are certain elements of the story that are not exactly how others remember them and are colored through vast amounts of alcohol and drugs. If you know that going in, you won't be disappointed. Just like punk rock, there is a lot of in-your-face anger and violence, so if you can't mosh with Jack's brain, don't attempt it.

The book recounts his childhood and growing up in the early 1960-70's with a pretty common story during this time period -- a lot of teens drank, did drugs and had sex. I think if he had been born a decade later, he would have been labeled ADD and put on drugs immediately. Instead Grisham self medicates to the extreme

like many of this generation. He pretty much drinks and takes whatever is put in front of him. You can really feel the pain he is experiencing. If this had been fiction, it would fit nicely into the paranormal realm that is so popular right now, I mean, I know I have read stories about evil demons that rape and pillage in pretty much the same manner. It takes on a whole nother meaning when it is presented as truth.

The demon analogy really works. It explains how he drove himself to change and become "human" through sheer willpower and a few people encouraging him to change. The only negative thing I can say about this book is that Grisham's charisma only somewhat comes through on the pages. He is one of those larger than life characters that cannot be contained by pages. Oh, and isn't that cover spectacular!

Hundeschlitten says

I've yet to read a book that better captures the manic desperation of my time growing up as a punk kid in Southern California than Jack Grisham's "An American Demon," of the existential dichotomy that everything was possible but that nothing was right. To read my full review, click the link here:

<http://aholeofthecentury.blogspot.com...>
