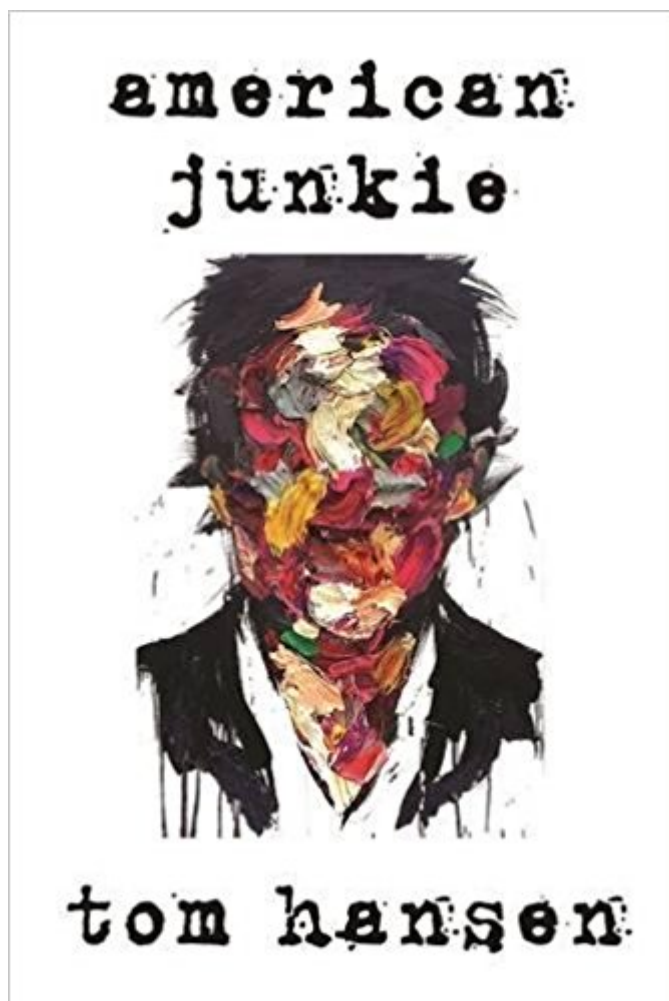


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# American Junkie



## Synopsis

In *American Junkie*, Tom Hansen takes us non-stop into a land of desperate addicts, failed punk bands, and brushes with sad fame, selling drugs during the Seattle grunge years. It's a story that maps his heroin addiction, from the promise of a young life to the prison of a mattress, from budding musician to broken down junkie, drowning in syringes and cigarette butts, shooting heroin into wounds the size of softballs, and ultimately, a ride to a hospital for a six-month stay and a painful self-discovery that cuts down to the bone. Through it all he never really loses his step, never lets go of his smarts, and always projects quintessential American reason, humor, and hope to make a story not only about drugs, but a compelling study of vulnerability and toughness.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Read as both a cautionary tale and an occasion for empathy as we struggle to reclaim lost lives and minds from the irresistible clutches of oblivion, Hansen's nightmarish odyssey is one of the most potent memoirs of its kind." *Seattle Times*; Heavy like the dark stuff itself; Mark Lanegan; . . . infused in equal measures with brutality and beauty. Gina Frangello, author of *My Sister's Continent*; *American Junkie* takes you to the gristle-chewing tracks of the gnarly Emerald City before the first wave of Sub Pop loving kids arrived, back when our dreams here had more to do with New York City and Los Angeles than being known locally; It's the period of post-punk fear and desperation that drives Hansen through most of the book that rings true for anyone who lived in the

wastelands where the city's clubs would spring up. . . . The opiated alternative doesn't seem like such a bad choice in a port city with little respect for its young people; not until your IV wounds are oozing liquid the color and consistency of olive oil and you've long ago forgotten about playing out.

—Chris Estey, KEXP Radio, Seattle, April 14, 2010

"A lot of writers can be harrowing on the page and others can be tender. But to be both tender and harrowing at the same time is a true literary feat. This book has heart. Granted, it's covered in track marks, but the heart beats beautifully long after you close the cover."

—Joshua Mohr, author of *Some Things That Meant the World to Me*, *Termite Parade*, *Damascus*, *Fight Song: A Novel* and *All This Life: A Novel*

"When Tom Hansen first sent me a galley of *American Junkie* prior to its publication, the book reeked so bad of stale cigarette smoke that my wife made me read it outside. To put it another way, the book oozes atmosphere. Hansen defies the well-worn tropes of the rehab memoir with a gritty and unapologetic vigor. *AJ* is less about the irrepressible human spirit, and more about the dirty, unglamorous, nuts-and-bolts machinations of addiction and denial. Tommy has more to show for a youth spent chasing the dragon than just a harrowing memoir about survival—he's got a chip on his shoulder, a filthy, one bedroom apartment, and a great, big hole in his ass. If you're looking for authentic reportage from the squalid trenches of addiction, look no further than the book in your hands."

—Jonathan Evison, author of *All About Lulu*, *West of Here*, *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*, and *This is Your Life, Harriet Chance*

"*American Junkie* is a brutally honest look at a fascinating life. The prose is beautiful, urgent, and sharp. The story gripping throughout. But perhaps the book's greatest achievement is that, in a world filled with books that exist to reassure, Hansen has given us a story with none of its rough edges sanded down to make it safe or easy to digest. This is a raw, uncompromising, and unflinchingly true portrayal of a man who has been through a lot. And who made it out the other side to write a stunning book. It's a book that will haunt readers, one you don't read so much as experience --and you will be transformed by the experience."

—Rob Roberge, author of *Liar*

"This is a rare *via dolorosa* that highlights what so many others fail to include: the absolute fact that even the smartest man in the world can't talk himself out of feeling pain where it truly exists. Hansen offers heartbreaking clarity of the kind of pain deep enough to inspire self-destruction, and he does so, miraculously, without self-pity or blame. A humbling and a powerful reminder that within an aching heart lies evidence of valuable humanity."

—Lenore Zion, Psy.D. sex/love addiction specialist and author of the books *Stupid Children* and *My Dead Pets are Interesting*

"Heavy like the dark stuff itself." - Mark Lanegan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable

edition of this title.

This has turned to be one phenomenal book. I read a lot about addiction, and Tom Hansen describes quite laconically and directly - as real as it gets - not only the physical decadence and the other done-to-death stuff, but the existential aspect. Why one decides to turn to heavy drugs. Why one cannot find any meaning in a world that you don't feel you belong in. Why you decide to drop out. Because no matter how many excuses or sociopsychogenetic reasons one gives, doing drugs is a choice. A personal choice that I often tried to understand in songs, books, movies, personal tales about the subject. I don't do drugs, never did, and never fully understood why so many did. Tom's story is harsh and direct like a whiplash. A book I won't forget.

This is an accurate picture of what it's like to ravage one's life by heeding the siren call of heroin, existing in the lifestyle, dealing, and coming back. The author describes numerous physical issues that some may find hard to read but it's worth it because this is no made-up story, this is real, folks, as real as it gets. How do I know? The author is a longtime friend and I can tell you, all of this is true and he is still clean! :) A very good read, a page-turner. He writes with such wistful perception; we see his humanness, we feel his pain. There is no romanticizing, he tells his story matter-of-factly, sparing little detail. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone looking to find out what severe addiction looks like. And Tom was a severe case, we're so happy to have him still with us. Very well-written, in a style that's simultaneously page-turning anticipation and the desire to reread passages slowly for impact. In other words, a good book on the truth of addiction and recovery, no punches pulled.

This is one of those rare books where the only disappointment is the fact that that it's day two and you're already done! I am not saying it's short by any means, you just cannot put it down. Very very few people have been able to sustain an addiction that bad for that long. Fewer can even fathom that a human can take addiction to these lengths, and as far as I know, he is the only one to do so and live to write about it! It's a must read, one of the few books that could help a non-user understand a user's mind and how powerful the substance is over mind and will. By the time Mr. Hanson dialed 911, he had shot up so much for so long that he was basically down to a head, torso, and his reproductive organs. What was left of the rest of him was open wounds that he still used IV drugs in! It's like a horrible wreck, you will not be able to drag your eyes away until you have passed it!

Tom brings to life what it must feel like to be suffering from addiction. I read it from start to finish over the course of two days. I just couldn't put it down, and there aren't many books I can say that about. I grew up in the same city, and went to many of the same places, so I really felt the connection, although my life went down a much easier path than Toms. It's a book everyone should read. It's a how-to book of what not to do when it comes to drugs I guess you could say. Tom led us all down a very dark path, but with humor. I applaud his ability to be so candid, even with the worst of his experiences. What an inspiring man!

Don't waste your time existing when you should be living and reading this book! Tom Hansen's memoir is a beautiful dichotomy of a man's struggle between two lives. One spent dreaming and one spent merely existing then becoming alive again. If you are looking for stories about rock stars doing drugs, you won't find it in these pages although names are dropped, if you are looking for tips on how to be a junkie rockstar and succeed, you also will not find that here. What you will find, is the heart and vulnerability of a man who bleeds the dark truth about addiction, recovery, life, and death.

In the wake of addiction memoirs by everyone from grizzled flat-lining rock and rollers to intellectually-overbearing college girls, lately the genre has felt tired and unoriginal. In fact, it is hard to find a reason to buy one more book about someone's struggle to find physical and spiritual redemption after a prolonged bout with a needle, pipe, or bottle. With "American Junkie," Tom Hansen breathes both life and hope into this genre with his compelling memoir "American Junkie." The book begins with two journeys that run parallel through the book, converging in the final pages. The journeys both belong to Hansen- one beginning in a seedy drug den, where paralysis, malnutrition, and giant gaping holes in his body mark the starting line; the other begins with Hansen's youth, growing up in rural Washington state with his hearty, well-intentioned, and caring parents. Though his narrative points out instances where these qualities are somewhat diminished by his parents' own challenges as hard-laboring immigrants, his relationship with them is ultimately satisfying, as he casts an eye of compassion and love on both of them. People are going to pick this book up because they see the word "Junkie" in the title and will likely expect a string of guns-and-money vignettes, with a deep look into the seedy underbelly of narcotics trafficking. These people will be surprised to read that Hansen's ascent from user to dealer is relatively non-violent, save for the punishing drug abuse he inflicts on his own body. However, his business model for dealing, his opinions of his product, his clients, and the inevitable entanglement with law

enforcement makes for gripping reading. Hansen writes in a plain, fast-moving style that is nothing short of captivating. Whether or not you have ever done drugs or struggled with addiction, you cannot help but relate to the emotions that he describes so well, and absent the cliches that have turned other stories so stale. I had set aside a week to read this book at my leisure. I finished it in a day, entirely unable to set it down. Like the subject matter underlying Hansen's story, it is truly an addictive read. Hansen's path through childhood into dealing high grade heroin to famous (and now deceased) rock gods of the Seattle grunge scene is fascinating on its own, but there is considerable consideration of Hansen's physical rehabilitation- an aspect rarely covered on all the rehab shows that are so popular now on television. So devastated was he at the nadir of his addiction that he had lost both the ability to walk and the desire to provide the most minimal care for himself. His style is particularly appealing due to the almost complete absence of self-pity and uber-charged navel gazing that drives so many other biographies into meandering circles of uninteresting narrative. Hansen writes with complete acceptance of his choices and the consequences thereof, such that the stories unfold with a disarming candor. But far from emotionally disconnected, Hansen's journey back into the world of the living is cobbled together by a series of relationships that seem to find him, and that evolve without expectation or judgment. Indeed, Hansen often indicates surprise that certain people not only fail to let him down, but that these people become his support- the daily maintenance that he requires to find a way to live a life that replaces drug abuse with meaning. The book is well-told and though it flows quickly, the details are somehow vivid and Hansen shows a proficiency for describing an event and its meaning to him without obvious or heavy-handed language. You care about Hansen right from the get go, which is a tribute to both his writing style and his spirit. Easily the best book I've read in 2010.

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