



The Tacoma Pill Junkies

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When Courtney Taylor, a 23-year-old clothing store manager and single mother, is mugged at gunpoint by a man who resembles a rodent, she loses self-esteem, an uncashed paycheck and her driver's license.

Shortly thereafter, Reno Walch, a custodian and drug user, discovers Courtney's license on a bus ride to work and seeks to return the wayward object. Meanwhile Reno's cohorts, a trio of pharmaceutical addicts, are making a fortune on ill-gotten prescription OxyContin while consuming as many pills as possible in-between. Fixated on their own personal goals, nobody notices the major media outlets reporting the acts of a killer running rampant through the nighttime streets of Tacoma.

The Tacoma Pill Junkies by Joshua Swainston follows the lives of working class twenty-something pill addicts as they find out what trouble success can bring. Behind it all, there is a series of murders involving a particular subsection of an under-appreciated work force.

The Tacoma Pill Junkies Details

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Author : Joshua Swainston

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From Reader Review The Tacoma Pill Junkies for online ebook

Allan says

This is a damn fine first novel(or second or third) for that matter. Swainston writes with authority; he knows character development and setting, something which many novelists don't seem to care about. He nails Tacoma; a west coast pulp mill town with it's mill rats and its 'smell of money'. I can really visualise the characters in T.P.J., the drugs might have changed over the years but not the life styles of the poor and infamous. Some of the best fiction nowadays is in the crime/detective field and Swainston gives us an ironic, funny and sympathetic look at how 'those people' live.

Unknown Unknown says

This will be a wonderful book! I'll read it outside in a lawn chair, or in the park. :)

M. Cain Harrison says

"It has been speculated that people can sense their own kind. Gays have 'Gaydar.' Former prison inmates share a hardened exterior. Soldiers have the thousand-yard stare. Drug users can spot other drug users for what they really are. Maybe it was a pheromone exuded by a struggling serotonin gland? Maybe it was a Sherlock Holmes deduction based on the observation of burned finger tips, bloodshot eyes and scratch marks around the base of the nose. All one has to do is look with the right set of eyes."

I'm not sure how I feel about this book. I had to think about it, for days after I finished, and so that probably means it's brilliant.

"Swaggering as best he could, he clustered up with a group of guys shooting pool. No one said anything directly to him, though it seemed as if no one said anything directly to anyone. Most of the conversation seemed to be blanket negation of the situation. Statements such as, "F--- , I'm bored." "This town is dead." "Never anything to do around here."

What I loved about this book is summed up by this passage. I grew up in and around Tacoma, and felt these sentiments on almost a daily basis. But like this book, returning home fills me with a sense of appreciation I can't define. The Tacoma Pill Junkies is funny, reminding me of one of my favorite movies, Snatch. It's cynical, ironic & honest, which happen to be my favorite things.

But I couldn't give this more than three stars for two reasons:

1. This book would benefit greatly from a meticulous editor. There were missing pronouns, incorrect word form and repeating phrases, i.e. "The cat jumped, then ate then ate the mouse."
2. I didn't fall in love with any of the characters. I felt at least one of the characters could have used more development or backstory. I never felt invested, and so I never felt affected by the tragedies that ultimately converged in the empty parking lot of the Tacoma Mall (I pictured the way the parking lot looked when I

waited in the car for my shopaholic mom who wouldn't leave the store until after they locked the doors to new customers). Why does Reno love crossword puzzles? Why is Martin Campbell suddenly obsessed with Courtney??? What led Courtney to getting pregnant as a teen?

Tacoma Pill Junkies is interesting, has an eloquent voice, but lacks a bit of the page-turning element. But definitely a fun read for anyone familiar with the Tacoma Aroma!

Girl Well Read says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

The story would have been more effective as a short story as I felt the characters were underdeveloped. I felt that especially Reno and Courtney needed more work - Swainston took the time to give Reno an affection for crosswords but doesn't really flesh out the character. The book also needed another thorough edit and maybe a substantive edit to tighten up the story as at times it went off the rails. That being said, it was a fun read.

Scott says

I can see how Tacoma gentrification lovers would frown on the myth this book creates in taking our city and keeping it mired in the grit and shady nature that truly is at its core. However, the grit is why I love Tacoma. This was a fun read illustrating a crime scene surrounding the jumpy nature of pill-junkies. I did get a little weary of the constant music and song references backing up all of the settings and the ending seemed like a quick "wrap up" session to the book. However, the soothsaying bus-riding handicapped dwarf was a disturbing and feisty element.

Mysti says

"Content and warm, pills and alcohol fused in his cerebellum like a blanket. The level of sublime surreal ecstasy could only be obtained through near fatal doses of harmful substances. Self-induced euphoria tolled a price that straight creatures, even tough ones, lacked the constitution to maintain. It required mutated genes, call it an X-man power, to undergo such personal defilement at the expense of bliss"

Cameron Kobes says

Knowing the Tacoma area will definitely enhance the experience of this book for the reader. Living in Tacoma, I thought the book was a stunning, if grim, portrayal of the city. The story is more multilayered and complex than you would expect of a crime novel, with credible storylines and characters and some shocking twists and turns. Toward the end I did think some of the events seemed a little rushed, but even so I was very impressed with the book overall.

Alec Clayton says

As clearly suggested by the title, the book is about a bunch of dealers and addicts who go about their business in Tacoma, Washington. It's about a corrupt cop and a couple of semi-competent rent-a-cops, a strange and irritating "Rat Boy," a trio of dealers who are not exactly bad guys but should be doing anything but what they're doing. And it's about Reno, a janitor at the mall, and Courtney, a single mother who manages a boutique. These would-be lovers stumble into one another and find refuge with one another; and they stumble into some very unsavory happenings.

As the lives of these characters play out something large and disturbing is going down in Tacoma. There's a serial killer on the loose and he's targeting, of all people, janitors in local institutions, including the mall where Reno and Courtney work.

Reno and Courtney likeable young people in dead-end jobs whose lives are going nowhere. Reno's most endearing characteristic is his obsession with crossword puzzles; he masters them with ease even when distracted and even when stoned. He is obviously too smart to be trapped in such an unrewarding life.

Courtney is dedicated to her young son and fed up with the idiots and bimbos at work.

I don't know anything about people who are addicted to pharmaceuticals or the people who illegally sell them, but the ways Swainston depicts them read as authentic.

Some of the characters in this book need more thorough development, and some of the writing is strained — as if Swainston is trying too hard to be literary instead of just telling his story, and the book could have used at least one more good edit; but overall it is a fun read about some engaging characters.

Debbie Olson says

This was a fun read! It is structured really well, with several characters with intertwining stories. A definite twist here and there so you are pleasantly surprised!

Alison Whiteman says

Swainston has a lot of potential as a writer. However, the characters fell flat for me. Courtney was a stereotyped single mother working at the mall. If I did the math correctly, she had the child when she was still a teenager. Reno reminds of an actual person I know in Tacoma, but this would have been from the mid-90s.

If I could rate the book for quality of sentences, I would give it a five. The author really nailed it with sentences like this: "This told Ben that most heavy users, dealers, pushers and addicts, not much was worth doing after the drug. Pottery class was just another thing to do until it became time to more or sell more."

I lived in Tacoma for 28 years so it was fun to read about all the usual haunts, but it also made me sad to think nothing has changed. I know the coffee crowd there. The crowd goes from coffee to alcohol in the evening. I could point you to many people who have bottles of pills and spend time looking them up to see how they can be abused.

This same group figures out any possible way to avoid working. I actually decided Reno only had a job because he does not or has failed to convince The Social Security Administration he has a disability.

Finally, I do look forward to seeing the author grow and write something that draws one in via characters one actually cares for. These people were pretty despicable. Mostly though, they fell flat.

Titus Burley says

Set in the familiar (local) landscape of the South Puget Sound, Swainston's debut novel takes you into the minimum wage lives and mall shrine existence of a cast of disaffected young adults who turn to pills to cope with a world that offers little real promise for fulfillment or advancement. Darkly comic characters - including a couple of memorable mall cops - populate a novel that includes a serial killer and syrupy elevator Muzak as atmospheric backdrop. Will the Alaskan gold strike effects of a long ill Grandmother's unused stash of Oxycontin that provides a sudden and unexpected bounty for a small group of users suddenly turned suppliers bring happiness or pain? Swainston plumbs the (perhaps new) genre of Mall Lit to reach a conclusion you will not expect. Comfortably paced, with a set of characters that grow on you, *The Tacoma Pill Junkies* is an enjoyable and promising debut novel.

Post Defiance says

Originally published at <http://postdefiance.com/chasing-the-t...> by Timothy Thomas McNeely.

There is a debate carried on throughout *The Tacoma Pill Junkies*, the new release from Tacoma author Joshua Swainston, regarding the best drug movie, and to a lesser extent, the best drug literature. It may well be debate that decides whether or not you like this novel. The pill junkies of the book's title argue variously for many movies, but they come down on "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," "The Big Lebowski," and "Trainspotting" as the strongest contenders. Swainston's story draws relatively equal parts from all of them, all with an addict's obsessive-compulsive need to keep the high going.

Reading *The Tacoma Pill Junkies* can be a bit like a trip, I suppose. The book has incredibly short, staccato chapters, compensating for whatever ADD or ADHD may need service in the reader; it catalogs, in great detail, the various quirks of each character, the dingiest details of its Tacoma exteriors, and of course every way in which to get high off of pills. Threaded throughout is a murder mystery that slow-burns to quite a surprise. And like any good drug movie, there is also the search for the next hit, the bigger hit, the last hit, and the consequences that go along, not least of which is more murders.

The story takes place, as the title suggests, in Tacoma. Swainston lives in Tacoma when he is not on a tug in Alaska (it is interesting to note this occupation of his, not least of which because one character, Val, is engaged in building the false persona of a long-time seaman through information mostly garnered out of old novels and nautical manuals he checks out at the Tacoma Public Library).

The Tacoma element in this book cannot be played down. And sadly, it is not an encouraging portrait of our fair city. However, we are, of course, talking about junkies and their friends. It makes sense that unflattering locations would be a regular element of such a tale. It will also make you increasingly uncomfortable with public transportation and the Tacoma Mall.

The novel is an intertwining of three stories: the janitors, the single mom, and the junkies. There is overlap into all three through the character of Reno, our “choose life” junkie, the one trying, over time, to clean up his act, largely for the sake of the single mom, Courtney, and her son, Aiden. Reno also, for some reason, does crossword puzzles, which conveniently mirror and comment upon the situations occurring while he’s filling them out.

In fact, at all times, we know what everyone is reading, what websites people view, and how everyone prepares their meals, their clothes, their deals, and their drugs. This overwriting, over-describing is both endearing and annoying: endearing for the true Tacoma-phyle and/or drug paraphernalia aficionado, who wants to know precisely the decor of Magoo’s, the smell of burning foil, or the route of the 53 bus; possibly annoying for the more plot-minded casual reader. It’s hard to decide what’s superfluous and if anything is essential, and at times it weighs down the action. In this, it follows some of the style of Chuck Palahniuk or Michael Chabon, true catalogers of experience, style, and place. In that spirit, Swainston is a competent craftsman, reveling like many Tacomans in the grit of this city.

For example, the book follows a bunch of night janitors around the Tacoma Mall, and while such moments are authentic, to a point, they are also sometimes only as interesting as you can imagine following night janitors around the Tacoma Mall may be. There are detailed references to everything from bus routes and the best food court vendors to steal soda from, to the equipment housed in service closets: “Inside was a set of shelves with several tools ranging from a Makita Chop-box to a Ryobi Power Drill as well as a plethora of hand tools. A bag of Purina dry cat food sat heaped in a corner. On the opposite side of the room from the tools sat what looked like an over-sized bumper car with amber lights mounted on the back. The Predator 40R Riding Automatic Floor Scrubber.” Now we know.

That said, many of the descriptions are simply so spot-on that it’s hard not to get a contact high from the recognition of a place or a Tacoma figure – much like seeing your personal haunts as backdrops in a movie:

Tower Lanes epitomized the essence of the mid-eighties bowling craze. Rust-colored carpet, pounded flat from decades of wear. Lanes accented with broken neon light. A hazy bar in back supported a smattering of regulars drinking tall boys of whatever was cheap that day. Three pool tables tucked back in next to the arcade heavily crowded by pre-drinking age kids trying to make a social happening. A Tacoma police officer stood watch by the front door. The jukebox in the corner played primarily late-eighties, early-nineties metal intermixed with current top forty and hip-hop.

There are drug-addled debates about picking up girls, porn sites, the best drug movies, ad nauseum. While this lays a thick layer of atmosphere over the book, it is as unbalanced as the drug users it describes.

Nonetheless, there are many choice images and descriptions to be had. Concluding a scene in the back office of a mall clothing store, we read: “As if the office was a piñata, a surly boutique manager and two make-believe cops burst out.” One purse-snatching character is given the name “Rat-boy” by our spunky single mom. One frequent bus patron is a foul-mouthed dwarf in a Rascal, a character who, in his rage, goes far beyond anything likely to be tolerated by real bus drivers or patrons in Tacoma.

There is a love story mixed up in it all. There are deals that go well, and those that go very, very badly. There are a vast array of Tacoma locales on display, from the east hill to Owen Beach.

If you like some of the virtues of the movies previously mentioned – drugs, the results of drugs, discursive conversation, and meticulous attention to details, even the uncomfortable ones – you’ll find a good read in *The Tacoma Pill Junkies*. If you always thought there should be a drug-laden murder mystery set in Tacoma,

you now have your book.

The Tacoma Pill Junkies by Joshua Swainston. 246 pp. Createspace by Amazon. \$12 paperback and \$4.99 ebook.
