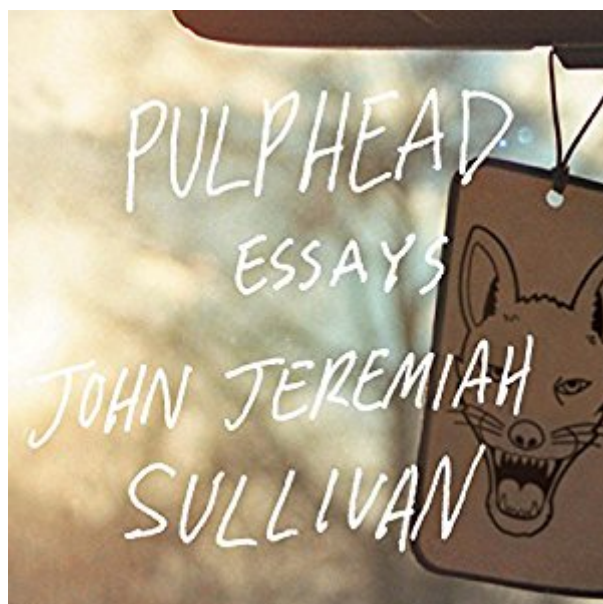


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Pulphead: Essays



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book for 2011 One of Entertainment Weekly's Top 10 Nonfiction Books of the Year 2011 A Time Magazine Top 10 Nonfiction Book of 2011 A Boston Globe Best Nonfiction Book of 2011 One of Library Journal's Best Books of 2011 A sharp-eyed, uniquely humane tour of America's cultural landscape - from high to low to lower than low - by the award-winning young star of the literary nonfiction world. In Pulphead, John Jeremiah Sullivan takes us on an exhilarating tour of our popular, unpopular, and at times completely forgotten culture. Simultaneously channeling the gonzo energy of Hunter S. Thompson and the wit and insight of Joan Didion, Sullivan shows us - with a laidback, erudite Southern charm that's all his own - how we really (no, really) live now. In his native Kentucky, Sullivan introduces us to Constantine Rafinesque, a nineteenth-century polymath genius who concocted a dense, fantastical prehistory of the New World. Back in modern times, Sullivan takes us to the Ozarks for a Christian rock festival; to Florida to meet the alumni and straggling refugees of MTV's Real World, who've generated their own self-perpetuating economy of minor celebrity; and all across the South on the trail of the blues. He takes us to Indiana to investigate the formative years of Michael Jackson and Axl Rose, and then to the Gulf Coast in the wake of Katrina and back again, as its residents confront the BP oil spill. Gradually, a unifying narrative emerges, a story about this country that we've never heard told this way. It's like a fun-house hall-of-mirrors tour: Sullivan shows us who we are in ways we've never imagined to be true. Of course we don't know whether to laugh or cry when faced with this reflection - it's our inevitable sob-guffaws that attest to the power of Sullivan's work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In "Unknown Bards", Sullivan's essay about American Blues music, we get this quote from Dean Blackwood of Revenant Records, "...I have always felt like there wasn't enough of a case being made for [blues musicians'] greatness. You've got to have their stuff together to understand the potency of their work." The same can be said about John Jeremiah Sullivan. Until now, Sullivan's essays have entered the public sphere only piecemeal through periodicals like GQ, Harper's Magazine, and The Paris Review. With "Pulphed", we get the first compilation of Sullivan's essays, and only the second book of his ever published. What emerges from this collection, more so than if one were to read these essays on their own, is a uniquely talented American writer and voice. Sullivan's prose is humble and emotional, while never self-centered or overbearing. His prose is opposite that of a political pundit's, a sophist sportscaster, or "expert" social media consultant. Our society is quick to confuse wisdom with declarative opinions. From Sullivan, don't look for grandiose reformations of opinions into facts. Words like guarantee, definitely, undoubtedly are as foreign to Sullivan as pretentious qualifiers like, "My twenty years of successful leadership on the Hill..." Or, "I have been saying all along, and I will say it again, John Doe is the best athlete since..." Sullivan deals in grey. In his essays, he even takes self-deprecating swipes at his own credibility as a writer: "I don't know. I had no pseudo-anthropological moxie left." Or, "Ordinarily, one is tense about interrogating strangers, worried about freezing or forgetting to ask what'll turn out to be the only important question.

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