



Amp'd

Ken Pisaní

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***Amp'd* from Ken Pisani, A *LOS ANGELES TIMES* BESTSELLER**

Finalist, 2017 Thurber Prize for American Humor.

“Complete with painfully wry observations and delightfully caustic wit, this novel is a gritty exploration of what it's like to feel incomplete in the world. All five fingers up for this bitterly satisfying tale.” —***Kirkus Reviews*(starred)**

Aaron is not a man on a hero's journey. In the question of fight or flight, he'll choose flight every time. So when a car accident leaves him suddenly asymmetrical, his left arm amputated, looking on the bright side just isn't something he's equipped to do.

Forced to return to his boyhood home to recuperate, Aaron is confronted with an aging father (a former Olympic biathlete turned hoarder), a mother whose chosen to live in a yurt with a fireman twelve years her junior, and a well-meaning sister whose insufferable husband proves love isn't just blind, but also painfully stupid.

As Aaron tries to make the world around him disappear in a haze of Vicodin and medical marijuana, the only true joy in his life comes from daily ninety-second radio spots of fun science facts: the speed of falling raindrops, batteries made out of starfish, and sexual responses triggered by ringtones - all told in the lush, disembodied voice of commentator Sunny Lee, with whom he falls helplessly, ridiculously, in love. Aaron's obsession with Sunny only hastens his downward spiral, like pouring accelerant on a fire. Pressured to do something - anything - to move his life forward, he takes the only job he can get: as a "fish counter" at the nearby dam, where he concludes that an act of violent sacrifice to liberate the river might be his best, final option.

Amp'd Details

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Author : Ken Pisani

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From Reader Review Amp'd for online ebook

Jesse says

This book reads like a memoir, which means that the author really knows his stuff about amputeeism... (quickly Googles to see if the author is an amputee...then Googles to see if amputeeism is a word...no, and no...oh well) So anyway, the author really did some research and it shows. The book comes across as funny and tragic and heartwarming all at the same time.

debra says

4-5* Read Kelly (and the Book Boar)'s great review of this book! Amp'd is clever, lough out loud funny, the dialogue is really wonderful (I'm referring to the book-but I'm really describing her reviews as well)...Oh-enough already- just go read Kelly's review - I'm just parroting here.

PS Diane S wrote a great review too (only difference is- she just discovered she likes cynical, ironic humor, and I always knew that I loved it!!)

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

Remember a couple of weeks ago when I was reading books just based on seeing a teensie little blurb posted out on the interwebs by friends? *Amp'd* fell into that category due to the first line of Sandra's review . . .

"I'm the guy who wakes up in the hospital to find out his arm has been amputated and says, Fuck me."

But then . . .

So I'm just now getting around to reviewing this sumbitch. And now I'm going to do something I absolutely loathe: **IF YOU ARE A FAN OF JONATHON TROPPER, THEN THIS IS THE BOOK FOR YOU!!!!** Since I get paid zero dollars for my book pushery and don't work as a publicist, you can trust that I'm not lying. If you fell in love with Judd in *This Is Where I Leave You* or any of Tropper's other loveable losers, you'll probably fall for Aaron as well.

As the snippet above states, Aaron's world is rocked when he wakes up after a car accident sans arm and has to move in with his father during his recuperation. It's in his childhood home that he (over)medicates himself with various prescriptions and pilfered bottles from his father's liquor cabinet, learns about his parents' unconventional separation, bonds with the family pet . . .

gets some harsh truth from his mother . . .

“If only there was a future in bullshit, Aaron. You’d be unstoppable”

starts falling for a voice on the radio, and makes a new friend in the most unconventional of ways . . .

Oh Ken Pisani . . .

You, sir, were an absolute delight to read. I loved nearly everything about this book – from the realness of Aaron’s pity party and downward spiral all the way to his redemption arc. And the writing? Oh, you’re good at dialogue . . .

“Do you have a dollar?”

“Yes?” he says tentatively.

“Well, hang on to it. Someday you may want to give it to a nice girl who dances for you.”

To quote from one of Tropper’s works . . .

I loved these idiots.

Edwin Howard says

AMP'D, by Ken Pisani, is the story of Aaron, who has recently lost his arm in a car accident. Aaron seems to have done his best to avoid life's choices the best as he can, but through his amputation and how the rest of the world reacts to him, especially those close to him, Aaron just might evolve into a better person. The book is poignant, biting reflective and quite funny.

The book begins with Aaron explaining his situation and what has happened and Pisani does a good job of exploring how most people would react to losing a limb, with some stark realities and self-deprecating humor. Aaron major coping mechanism, even before the accident, is humor. His mother ignores it, his father grunts at it, and his sister yells at him for it. Pisani does a good job of portraying Aaron as an ungrateful, smart-mouthed mooch who doesn't seem to want to help himself, but as people meet him, they can't help but like him, slowly revealing that Aaron isn't quite the loser he seems to be at the beginning of the book. I liked that Pisani was careful to write Aaron and the book slightly differently depending on how high Aaron was at a particular moment. It really added to the flow of the book. All of the supporting characters around Aaron were a joy to meet as well, from his former Olympian turned grumpy father, to a boy dying of cancer who has passion for life most people wish they had, to alligator pet that seems to have a personality all his own. I was reminded of writers Jonathan Tropper and Craig Lancaster while reading AMP'D; all three writers have a knack for writing about people who deep down are good people who just haven't found that about themselves yet.

AMP'D was a joy to read and I think most people would enjoy it. Pisani seems to enjoy writing and I look

forward to his next book.

I received this book as part of a Goodreads Giveaway!

Tania says

I'm so happy that I finally got to this book that was recommended by a friend a while ago. I loved all the characters, the humor, the interesting scientific tit-bits throughout the book, the lists and the fact that it is very much politically incorrect. This is written so convincingly that I thought I was reading a memoir. Aaron is honest, intelligent, funny, depressed and very entertaining. He is definitely not known for making considered choices, but this seems to run in the family. I laughed a lot, but there are also quite a few sad moments. I highly recommend this amusing, quirky and sweet story about trying to feel complete again. The Story: Aaron's life is derailed after a bad car accident that leads to the amputation of his left arm. He holes up in his dad's attic, concocts cocktails of painkillers and medical marijuana, and attempts to abdicate from life. Even as he continues to protest and make lists of all the things he can't do with only one arm, life keeps finding him in the form of an alligator, a boisterous kid with cancer, a job counting fish, an alluring radio personality, and another amputee.

Alison says

This was a wry, caustic, funny, quick and enjoyable read. The main character loses his arm in a car accident and has to move back home with his dad. Lots of Midwestern family drama, but in a family you would like to be part of. Lots of weirdness, like an alligator in the bathtub and excessive amounts of Vicodin and medical marijuana. All told with a quiet understated humor and insight into tragedies and how we deal with them. Really amusing, tragic, and touching.

Sonja Arlow says

This book really deserves to get more attention.

Aaron wakes up after a horrendous car accident, minus one arm. With a failed marriage, a mediocre career as a teacher and now handicapped, at the age of almost 40 he is forced to move back to his childhood home.

I really loved the fact that Aaron was not portrayed as a man that rises from adversity, no Aaron is really pissed about what happened to him and the only rising he does is to go refill his prescription for medical marijuana. He was not always the most likable person but he grew on me.

The aftermath of his accident and subsequent move back home is told with humour, even if it's the very dark and self-deprecating kind. Initially I worried that the funny would turn in to facetious but the more I read the more I enjoyed this.

The words laugh out loud has lost its meaning with its overuse but that's the only description that fits as there were a few sections that had me howling unexpectedly with laughter.

I loved that both parents, each in their own way, did not coddle Aaron about his amputation. No nonsense parenting in full force. And as an added bonus I learned more about fish counting and pet alligators than I ever wanted to.

Uniquely quirky and definitely worth the read.

Tooter says

4.25 Stars!

Esil says

3 ½ stars. Amp'd is an entertaining romp. Thirty year old Aaron loses an arm in a car accident, and then moves in with his father. Feeling hard done by, Aaron proceeds to descend into a bout of bad behaviour peppered with plenty of bad attitude. The book is told from Aaron's perspective, with lots of dark humour and some underlying real emotions – especially when it comes to the feelings towards his family. Aaron's world is populated by an odd assortment of characters that add to the humour of the story – his mother and father are particularly well depicted. I didn't love Amp'd – I never felt fully in synch with its humour – but I found it entertaining and think that Pisani does a good job of depicting Aaron as a self-deprecating grouch with a few redeeming qualities. It's a common literary figure, but done well in this case. Thank you to the publisher and Netgalley for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

LeAnne says

Ok, so my husband hears me keep snickering over here and asks me what this book is about. "Well, there's this amputee.. WAIT!" Too late - he's already judged me. But this story is funny, I swear. And entrancing.

When Aaron comes to in the hospital, he will tell you straight up that he is not going to be some guy who overcomes adversity and inspires others. He is pissed off having lost his arm in a car wreck, and the very first productive thing he does is make a list. A list of all the stuff he now cannot do. Wear mittens. Open a jar. Shuck corn. Push a wheelbarrow. Cut up steak.

Divorced and pushing 40 (one handed), still stumbling through recovery from the accident, Aaron is stuck moving back to his home town where his retired father - who won't acknowledge what's now "missing" from his son - can care for him. The dad loves watching SportsCenter, but when the two note all the swings, pitches, and double plays that Aaron will never be capable of, it's time to change channels. "The final indignity is the umpire calling a play at the plate by signaling "safe," both arms spread wide like a fat airplane."

Aaron's mother has moved out but reappears to help motivate him with her no-nonsense version of Zen, dispensed while gutting him in games of pool shot in the basement (yet another thing a one armed man cannot do). "Leaning over the table, she bore some resemblance to a praying mantis, all skinny limbs stretched at odd angles from the end of her backless heel to the tips of her fingers, dusty with chalk."

Neither of the parents can edge Aaron out of his snarky (but darkly hilarious) attitude, so when his sister flies in with her goof of a husband, they have some hope. What Aaron has, though, is some potent medical marijuana, Vicodin, a lot of cheap vodka, and a wasted brother-in-law who thinks tattooing a newly amputated stump is a grand idea.

And that's just the first few chapters.

At heart, Aaron has spent his whole life not trying very hard. When given the choice between what he wants for himself and the promises he makes to others, he never makes a sacrifice. He will crawl out of a bathroom window - one armed, mind you - to avoid people he doesn't want to deal with.

Friends, potential lovers, law enforcement, a foul mouthed little kid, and a pet alligator ultimately amp up the pressure on Aaron to stop feeling so self-absorbed. But this is Aaron here, and he has other losses to face.

That an author can include regular scenes of glee in a character study of a guy who feels like he will never be loved again - or ever be good at anything - is a testament to some skill. Look, I've got a teenager who is disabled - lifelong, big time. To be able to laugh out loud, despite the crap, is the secret to life. Pisani's got it.
5 stars

My thanks to those at Net Galley for an early reading of Amp'd.

Lynne says

A quirky story about a 40 year old who lost his arm in a car accident. He's not a pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of guy so the story is pretty much a downer. The humor is very cynical which can be cute for a while but not for the entire story. There were also some anti-government false information parts that put me off the story. I do appreciate the book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sandra says

*"I'm the guy who wakes up in the hospital to find out his arm has been amputated and says,
Fuck me."*

A witty and quirky book about Aaron who lost his left arm in a car accident. He goes back to his childhood home to live with his father and start his life as a one-armed man. Not taking things too seriously, he usually lives in a haze of painkillers and weed.

We meet many interesting characters, from his parents and sister, to his colleagues and friends, the one who had a special place in my heart, was a young boy Adam meets in the hospital. That kid had some spunk in him! Along the way, Adam learns that not everything is all about him all the time, and while things not always go the way he wanted, he manages to find his spot in this world. And that deep down inside him, he is still that good guy he always was.

A very lighthearted read, eventhough dealing with a difficult subject as amputation.

THINGS YOU CAN'T DO WITH ONE ARM

Clap

Floss

Juggle

Climb a ladder

Button a shirt

Tie shoelaces

Wear mittens

Open a jar

Shuck corn

Butter toast

Toss a salad

Cut a steak

Rope cattle

Count money

Fold laundry

Put a shirt on a hanger

Bench press

Drive a stick

Pet two dogs

Cover your ears

Use a bow and arrow

Monkey bars!

Push a wheelbarrow

Pump a fireplace bellows

Build a snow fort

Make meatballs

Open one of those grocery produce bags

Scratch that spot right in the wrong side of the middle of your back

Play an instrument

word gem:

penurious *adj.:* 1. extremely poor; poverty-stricken 2. parsimonious; mean

Review copy supplied by publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a rating and/or review.

Diane S ? says

I learned a few things about myself after reading this novel. I love cynical and ironic humor and I love reading about families that are stranger than my own. In essence I loved this book though I admit it sounds kind of sick to love a book about a man who loses his arm in an SUV accident and has to move in with his father at the age of forty. This book, though is full of laugh out loud humor, an alligator, an amusing mother

and father with a very different sort of relationship and a sister with a husband who can best be described as lazy and dumb. Oh, and most poignantly a little boy with cancer. Of course there is sadness and bitterness but the main character Aaron is doing his best, or is he? There are also lists and factoids from a radio show that keeps Aaron from completely giving up and there are the others things that life and fate throws at a person.

All on all for me this was a brilliant read, a fun and funny read and a book that moved so fast that I was done before I knew it. Have now passed it on to my hubby who is also loving it.

Mike W says

Aaron wasn't exactly winning the game of life, even before the accident that forever changed him. A failed marriage and a job for which he doesn't much care are what define him until the day his car is struck by an SUV and he loses his left arm. After a lengthy rehab, he is forced to return to his childhood home, moving in with his father because he simply has nowhere else to go. It's hard to imagine a premise less comfortable, however, Ken Pisani's new novel *Amp'd* is irreverent, edgy, soulful, and yes, at times even outright hilarious.

Aaron's first person narrative is self-deprecating, his depression practically paralyzing him as he attempts to take up living again and we see the world through the eyes of a man who cannot hide what has happened to him. This is profoundly expressed throughout the novel, my favorite being a scene where he and his father (who does not ever mention the accident or the arm) go out to breakfast their first morning together. A restaurant full of people he's known his whole life cannot ignore him but also cannot face him, the room seeming to freeze and their eyes finding more comfortable targets. As you might imagine, this does little to lessen the depression, and Aaron finds himself escaping out the bathroom window, running as he will do many times instead of facing his problems.

Luckily for him, Aaron has many who care for him and lucky for the reader, these characters are almost without exception interesting and entertaining. His father, a former Olympic biathlete, his mother who has moved out and is having a tryst with a much younger man, a fireman she saw in a calendar, his sister and her annoying husband. Each is flawed in significant ways, but their intentions are noble and their interactions are fodder for comedy and for pondering some of life's basic truths.

It is in the melding of humor with the serious business of addressing the randomness and unfairness of the universe that this novel succeeds. "I've learned that anything can happen to anyone at anytime" Aaron confesses, also conceding that he "is not a guy who faces down hardship and emerges a better, fuller person" It is this honesty that endears the reader to Aaron. this is not the story of a man determined to emerge from a horrible accident stronger and more determined than ever. This is a man just looking for reasons to get out of bed in the morning.

One of the early ways he copes is via medical marijuana, having obtained a prescription in an entertaining scene between Aaron, his father and their doctor. The collective has a multitude of choices and some of Pisani's best comedy comes in the names he gives to these options throughout the book.

Slowly, Aaron begins to live life again, but true to form, he does nothing normally. From his choice of meds to his choice of job to his co-workers and acquaintances, nothing is predictable, and nobody is normal. He

begins to fall for a woman named Sunny whose voice he hears during a short science segment on the radio each day, and like her name implies, she becomes one of the only bright spots in his days. But it is when he befriends a young boy with terminal cancer that he begins to understand what it will mean to resume truly living again, and Pisani deftly mines this friendship to bring home the book's most meaningful observations.

Amp'd is an immensely interesting and profound novel. It forces the reader to address difficult questions without looking away, but is written in a style that makes doing so not only palatable, but rewarding. This is a reading experience that I highly recommend and one that I won't soon forget.

-note: I received an advanced copy of this book free for the purpose of review

Allie says

This book! Why aren't more people talking about this book?!

Anyone out there a fan of useless information? Think bathroom books. You know, those books full of facts that are interesting but superfluous. Well, Ken Pisani has managed to put those facts to good use. Amp'd is basically a peek into the life of a fairly dysfunctional, yet loving (in their own way) family -- peppered throughout with useless facts that work. I laughed, my heart hurt a little, and I laughed some more. A lot, actually. Irreverently. (Don't read this if you're easily offended. {Pansy.})

I highly recommend this. A very good read!
