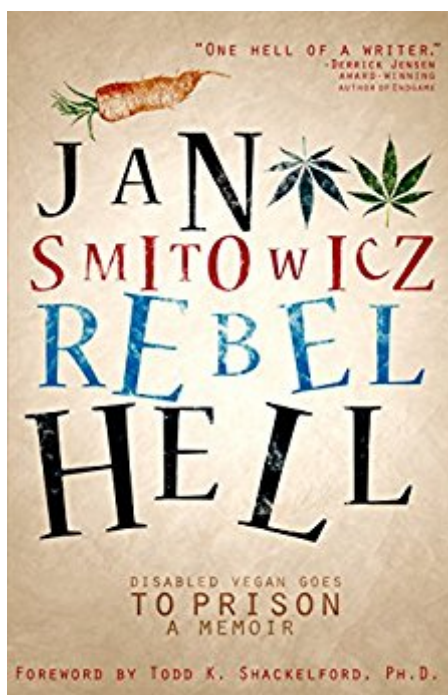


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# Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes To Prison



## Synopsis

Novelist Jan Smitowicz was arrested in 2010 after an illegal search and seizure, eventually spending two years in Illinois state prisons. *Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison* is a captivating, profoundly intimate memoir about his descent into the kaleidoscopic "Prison Vortex." A darkly funny narrative filled with endless bureaucratic absurdity and shocking corruption, like the state's unbelievable offer to cut Smitowicz's plea deal nearly in half if he paid a \$25,000 "fine," encouraging him to literally buy a reduced sentence! Smitowicz maintains a fearless devotion to the unadulterated truth, no matter how brutal or degrading. His pitch-black humor and sociopolitical audacity run roughshod over every scorched target. Ultimately, *Rebel Hell* coalesces into a disturbing microcosm of contemporary U.S. society and an unforgettably original story.

## Book Information

File Size: 10318 KB

Print Length: 440 pages

Publisher: The Rewild West Publishing (May 23, 2017)

Publication Date: May 23, 2017

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B072PRW9FP

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #183,631 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #237

in Kindle Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Special Needs #379 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Criminals #747 in Kindle Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Crime & Criminals

## Customer Reviews

Foreword to Jan Smitowicz (2017), *Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison*. You are about to read [or so the book's author hopes] an extraordinary memoir by an extraordinary man. First, I'd like to briefly relay how I came to know Jan Smitowicz. In my role as

Distinguished Professor and Chair of Psychology at Oakland University [Rochester, Michigan], I have for the past several years organized an international two-day conference that brings together smart people from around the world to talk about a broad and unsettled area of work within my own field of evolutionary psychology. These conferences have featured the brightest minds in the social, behavioral, and life sciences, but also some of the most gifted fiction and non-fiction writers, both within and outside of academia. Our past conferences include “The Evolution of Violence,” “The Evolution of Sexuality,” and “The Evolution of Morality.” Our most recent conference, held in the spring of 2016, addressed “The Evolution of Psychopathology.” By the fall of 2015 I had locked in most of our panelists, but had yet to find a novelist that fit well with the conference theme, a novelist whose work incorporated elements of psychopathology. Over the past several years I have become deeply interested in anti-natalism. In 2010, I read David Benatar’s *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* and, after some soul-searching, found his arguments deeply convincing and equally unsettling. Fast forward a few years to the fall of 2015. I stumbled upon a podcast featuring an interview with David Benatar. This particular episode featured three interviewees, each of whom was struggling in their own medium with issues of anti-natalism. David Benatar provided an academic philosopher’s perspective. The Norwegian rapper Mistro provided a musician’s perspective on how one might address issues of anti-natalism. And then there was Jan. The podcast hosts had invited him on to offer a novelist’s perspective—how might one incorporate social justice concerns, including anti-natalism, into the plot and characters of a novel? Jan had recently published his debut novel *Orange Rain*. I understood from the interview that Jan incorporated anti-natalist ideas into the characters and plot in a book that sounded fascinating. I liked Jan’s brutally honest but deeply empathic responses to the interviewers’ questions. Within a few days I had purchased and read the novel. And what a novel! I knew Jan would be an ideal panelist for our upcoming conference—a novelist whose work incorporated themes of psychopathology into the plot and characters. Plus, I liked his edginess. Academics need more edginess in their lives—especially academics that attend fancy conferences. I reached out to Jan and extended an invite. He leapt at the chance to join us, and I am so grateful for it: Jan’s uniquely stylized perspective as a panelist helped make this one of our most enjoyable and stimulating conferences; moreover, his talk on anti-natalism and how he incorporates such important themes into his writing was a highlight of the conference! When he

visited Oakland University, Jan was adamant: If I liked Orange Rain, I'd really enjoy his prison memoir-in-progress. I was pleasantly surprised when he asked me to write the Foreword. Which you •Dear Reader, as Jan would say •are now [presumably] reading. After receiving the "Januscript," I devoured it in just a couple days. Not out of obligation, either •I simply couldn't put the book down! It soon became clear that Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison is a stunning masterpiece. The content is certainly remarkable •a vegan, disabled young man's harrowing experiences during a two-year imprisonment in Illinois for trafficking marijuana. Also remarkable •in fact, singularly unique among the memoirs I have read •is Jan's unequaled stylistic panache; his beautifully crafted, outrageously candid, deeply empathic, and often uproariously funny narrative voice. He reveals the immense trauma of life in the "Prison Vortex" with incredible clarity. Even more substantial, however, is how he managed to engender the sense that I now know this man on a thorough and deeply personal level. I suffered when he suffered. Feared when he feared. And I was overjoyed when he triumphed. Despite the dreadful circumstances, Jan somehow unearths humor in the very darkest places and does so throughout. On many occasions, I found myself laughing right alongside him amid some of the most outrageously frustrating situations imaginable. His multifarious depictions of endless struggle against prison doctors hell-bent on decreasing or discontinuing his very necessary pain medications are equal parts hilarious and soul-withering. Oh •and then there are his disturbing, disgusting, but above all entertaining accounts of frequent physical-psychological degradation he was forced to endure with the . . . well, let's just say the seedier aspects of prison life. Leaving the narration of those sordid details to the man who must forever live with them. Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison is a memoir •a story •like no other.

Rebel Hell is a captivating peek into the world of the prison industrial complex and the mind-boggling number of victims it claims. The disparities between the percentage of whites and people of color incarcerated is a recurring theme, and one that I firmly believe every man, woman, and child should be intimately familiar with. Along with this, though, is the journey of the author as he navigates the "health care" system (somewhat naively at first, in my opinion, but you might well learn along with him just how little prison's company men and women truly care about inmates, with almost no regard as to the legitimacy of their disability), detox from pain medications, and immense emotional turmoil. We also get to know the few inmates he is able to find solace with as well as

interpersonal experiences with the likes of racists, sexists, and homophobes and his unwavering resolve to confront them even under threats of extended or higher security punishment. Also, despite the dire circumstances, the author does manage to render many situations and conversations totally hilarious. I think many will also find humor in his rage-fueled rants against injustice (aka soapbox moments) and exchanges the author has with the reader and \*himself\* through various unique writing techniques. This is a timely story with important messages and themes that should and really NEEDS to be read and shared and talked about!

I recently had the pleasure of reading Jan Smitowicz's first major non-fiction book, Rebel Hell. What a read! I greatly enjoyed Jan's two previous fiction books, Orange Rain and Redwood Falls. Rebel Hell details Jan's prison stint for marijuana smuggling. The indignities and horrors Jan endures are all the more infuriating when one considers that his "crime" involves moving a harmless plant that millions of people use on a regular basis over some imaginary line. One of the most appealing aspects of Rebel Hell, and Jan's writing in general, is the black humor that he creates out of his predicaments. Jan's sense of humor is infectious. Rebel Hell allowed me to laugh at and put into perspective my own absurd circumstances after I was done with the book. Jan's survival/coping skills are impressive as he navigates the so called "justice system" trying to keep chronic pain at bay and vegan principles and soul intact. If you are looking for a real page turner that rivets you, makes you laugh and makes you think, waste no further time and get this book....it's astonishing....

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