

THE
BRITISH DEVIL



GREG HOBGEN

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British national Greg Stephens knew there would be challenges in his new relationship with handsome American Navy officer Danny Taylor: long distance; Don't Ask, Don't Tell; the Defense of Marriage Act; US immigration....

But he didn't anticipate his greatest obstacle: Danny's born-again Christian mother, Vivien. A secretary in a small-town Southern Baptist church in Texas, she bristles at Greg's secular beliefs. Through passive-aggressive manipulation, subtle deceit, or outright battle, Vivien resolves to banish Greg and return Danny to the fold, come hell or high water. Greg's hold on Danny's heart is pitted against Vivien's crusade for Danny's soul.

All the while, Greg devotes himself to keeping Danny happy while negotiating the cultural differences of his life in America. Danny's new career as a lawyer takes them from his native Texas to New York. But with Vivien testing Greg's stiff upper lip at every turn, something has to give.

The British Devil is a semiautobiographical novel exploring culture, religion, and love in a bi-national relationship.

The British Devil Details

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From Reader Review The British Devil for online ebook

LenaLena says

This book made me think about my mother in law. A lot. Not that she's a Jesus Freak from Texas, she's an 88 year old Southern Belle from Georgia. Different brand of crazy, but crazy none the less. She will be nothing but gushingly lovely to my face, while telling all her friends what a horrible wife and mother I am. Just this morning she came to the conclusion that a watch she couldn't find must have been taken by our son. When he visited her last, two years ago. You know. Crazy - hurtful - stuff like that. And a new episode every week.

So when you write a book about dealing with a crazy mother in law, you can go two ways. You either play it up for laughs or you let the reader share the hurt you've experienced, because it really isn't funny at all when it really comes down to it. I tend to share my stories as funny, because I am 100% sure that my husband would pick me over his mother, if asked. (In fact, he told her when we got together that if she ever treated me the way she treated her daughter's husband he would never see her again. Hence the gushing and the backstabbing). Greg doesn't have this luxury. Unlike my husband, Danny hasn't long ago acknowledged that his mother is crazy and he is more of a stick-your-head-in-the-sand-can't-we-all-just-get-along kinda guy. Greg, naively, thinks he can keep the full extent of mother's nastiness from Danny, because he doesn't want Danny to have to choose. Admirable, but in the end untenable, as anyone ever in that situation would know. The tension in this book comes from expecting the inevitable blow up.

While I liked the book, I think it suffered from not coming down on a clear side of funny or tragic. Maybe it was meant to be more tragic, but was it written too Britishly reserved to have the full impact. Or maybe the humor was too understated for me.

All the examples of American ignorance when it comes to other cultures and the irritating overrating of the importance of their own were recognizable to me as Dutch import resident in California, but could have been done more scathingly. Maybe they're more shocking to Europeans who haven't been here and for Americans who don't like to be criticized, but for me it was more of a 'yeah, and..?' when these things were mentioned. I wish Greg had wielded a scalpel instead of a butter knife throughout the book.

(view spoiler)

All in all an enjoyable story, but one that could have been better.

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

This book made me kind of mad.

"The British Devil" is a semi-autobiographical book about an international relationship between an American

and a British man. More specifically, it is about how the American character has an uber-Christian mother who is out to destroy the relationship between the two MCs. I'd say 80% of this book dealt with either religious issues or problems within Greg and Danny's relationship. While some readers found it to be humorous, I did not. I was actually really stressed while reading it.

I think what turned me off from this book more than anything was the judgmental tone of Greg (aka the author/MC). Now, I'm an American but I'm not like a "Ho Rah!" American. I'm not one to talk about American superiority, or lack thereof, and I'm more than willing to admit that my country isn't perfect. However, I felt like Greg was outright disdainful of all things American and made gross generalizations about the culture.

"In New York, the poor were surrounded by some of the wealthiest people in the world, who would sling a coat on their arm that was worth the same amount as two years' worth of begging on the street. I recognized that torment behind their eyes. But unlike the look of desperate starvation in Mombasa, the poor in New York had a look of desperate jealousy. Of course, we had the same thing in Britain, but to me it seemed like the British passes by without a look if they had no desire to help- which was also very harsh, as it gave the impression that these people were invisible and not worth acknowledging. But in New York, it seemed that people walked past and made a point of screwing up their noses or muttering something insulting at the homeless, acting as though they were merely getting in the way by blocking the sidewalk as the richer residents power walked past."

Generalize there much? The book is filled with quotes like that, trashing Americans for being rude, tacky, and overweight.

"I knew Americans tended to be loud, but it still wound me up the wrong way despite being in their company so long."

"I went from being quietly cautious about my personal safety to laughing out loud in the street as I saw scores of women who had seen far too many episodes of Sex and the City. They looked unsure whether their ridiculous 'couture' dress sense clashed with the ten-dollar knockoff neon-green handbag they just bought from one of the local bootleggers in Chinatown."

"As I put my arm around him I noticed a couple walking toward us. The man was an extremely overweight redneck wearing white shorts and an XXXL T-shirt with an array of freshwater fish printed on the front, pushing a cart full of brightly colored boxes of corn dogs, pizza, and Tex-Mex ready-made meals. His wife, barely smaller than her husband, pulled her peroxide blond hair back into a vicious ponytail and was trying to pull off a pink-frilled sleeveless top that didn't match the camouflage shorts, which were bursting at the thighs."

It doesn't just stop at Americans. Apparently, you have to be the "right kind of gay" for Greg to think you're okay.

"Although they were near perfect to look at in the gym and fully clothed, the changing room revealed their extreme body acne, the telltale signs of steroid abuse. But any kind of fantasy about their ripped physiques would drop the instant they opened their mouths. No man who gives the world the impression of supreme masculinity should have pink glitter spill from his mouth when he speaks. How the hell they held up those heavy weights with such limp wrists remains a mystery to me."

Lets count the ways Greg is judgmental: Gay stereotyping and douchiness? Making fun of fem guys? Fat

shaming? Calling someone a redneck? Making fun of pre-packaged food? People that bleach their hair? Americans? New Yorkers? **What kills me is that Greg kept being appalled at how Danny's mom was judgmental of non-Christians and yet Greg was just as bad!**

Apparently you are only a mean person if you make fun of things that GREG deems wrong (aka gay rights, some minorities) but it is okay to mock just about anything else. I found Greg to be horribly hypocritical.

Now onto the issue of Danny's mom, aka the super-Christian. This book is semi-autobiographical and if Danny's mom was 1/8 the evil woman that she was shown to be in this book, then I truly feel sorry for Greg and Danny. We were meant to dislike the woman and I did. However, I don't really enjoy reading about religion and religion is discussed throughout the majority of the book. I thought, based on the blurb, that it would be kind of a side plot and not the main focus of the book... but it was. There was very little romance in this story (and no sex on page, no mention of sex for that matter). Most of the story is religious battles and Greg and Danny having arguments dealing with the stress of being long distance and having difficult work schedules. I really wasn't that interested in all of that.

I think part of the problem is that I couldn't personally relate to the story that much. I have read a few reviews where people have also had to contend with small-town personalities and very religious people, and so I think they have a connection to this story that I didn't have. I wanted some humor, some romance, some heat, something positive! All I got was a MC that I didn't like all that much (Greg) and a lot of complaining.

The ending almost dropped my rating to 1 star because I hated it so much (I should probably rate 1 star anyway because I'm picking this book apart!). (view spoiler)

Okay, I think you guys figured out that this didn't work for me. I can see why, with the right reader, they would like this, but I certainly did not. The only reason I'm keeping this as two stars is that it was very readable and I stayed up late to see what would happen. Other than that, it was a miss.

Deeze says

I might just be biased but I loved this book lol.

Greg is a wonderfully funny character with a sense of humour that had me chuckling out loud.

Danny is the best of both worlds, strong and sure yet soft and tender.

Vivien was the worse kind of hypocrite. I hated her with a passion.

This was a real romance story. The love Greg and Danny find and nurture is wonderful to watch unfold.

The realism of this book was in every page, from Greg's last days with his father, to Craig and Greg trying to one up each other as only brothers can. Then there's poor George who loved his wife even though he saw her change from the woman he married. Even Tucker, who I found pretty annoying most times, was believable.

This book managed to be both entertaining but extremely thought provoking at the same time.

If I had any complaints it was with the speed of Vivian seeing the error of her ways. Out of everything that felt the least real to me. (I really hope if Vivian was based on a real mother that she was largely exaggerated) I would also of liked to see a little more intimacy between our two guys. I loved that there was no sex in this book. Frankly it made a refreshing change to have that go on behind closed doors, but a few kisses would have been nice lol.

But that aside I recommend this to everyone looking for a real romance.

Hank L. says

Didn't work for me, maybe it was the setting and characters. Not interesting to me and certainly wouldn't want to run into them in real life. Perhaps I'd give it a higher ranking if the plot was thicker. Also distasteful stereotypes of both sides. Not my cup of tea.

Deja Dei says

I really enjoyed this book. The dry humor was well done and I especially liked the dialogue. Because the growing relationship between the characters was so well done I didn't miss the sex scenes at all. These characters had so much depth I felt like I knew them and wanted to see good things happen for them kept me reading. The conflicts are realistic and not overdone angst. If I have one criticism, it's the abrupt change in attitude of the mother at the end. Thought the resolution came a little too easily, I loved everything else. I like this author's voice and style and will be looking forward to more from him.

Edina Rose says

This is a semi-autobiographical Gay romantic fiction with no explicit sex. It covers serious issues like gay rights, religious homophobia, but also culture shock and long distance relationship.

The author is a British man with a typical British humour and a very descriptive style. There are many Main Characters and they are all fantastic, even the "villains". If you like British humour (and don't mind discussing religion), you'll have a BLAST!

It's told in Greg's POV.

Greg, a British young steward in his twenties, falls in love with Daniel, a Texan navy officer stationed in Bahrain who is at the end of his active duty. For three years they manage a long distance relationship with Greg in the UK and Daniel in Texas studying law. It's not easy but it would be OK if not for Daniel's mum. She is a very religious woman who considers non-religious Greg as the worst thing that could happen to her son. Her reasons are complex and even she has difficulty articulating why she sees Greg as the devil in her garden. I found her character as the big villain amazing.

Over three and plus years, we follow Greg and Daniel as they deal with the many obstacles that threaten their commitment: the hostile mum, the distance and the loneliness, the doubts, the US immigration law, the culture shock.

I found the conflict resolution with Daniel's mum at the end of the book a bit rushed but this is minor stuff. The book as a whole is great and the serious issues are covered with so much humour that you shake with anger one moment and shake with laughter the next.

One of my favourites passages is when Greg asks his friends for advice:

"What can I do to make this woman like me?"

"Walk on water," Lee suggested.

"Cure the blind," offered Jackie.

"Come back from the dead," said Steve.

"Feed the starving in Africa," Donna ended the round before adding, "No, wait. That was Bob Geldof."

I put my face in my hands and spoke through my fingers. "Okay, I will get straight onto it. Thank you for all of your sage advice."

Baba says

3.5 stars.

Troy says

This novel had no trouble keeping me turning the pages! The author shows off a really great sense of humor. This kept the novel lighthearted even despite some serious themes.

There were some small things that erked me though.

I felt towards the second half of the novel it was a bit too anti-American (I'm not American!) and even a bit overly harsh anti-Christian (I'm by no means a Christian either!), it was as though the author was trying to get his opinion across instead of just telling the story.

Also the eventual confrontation between Greg and Mrs Taylor was a bit overly dramatic and the reconciliation much too easy.

Nonetheless I really enjoyed it and will most likely read the sequel.

DL says

Loved the beginning of this book. Then the mother was introduced and the story took a different turn. The tone changed. I made it about half way but I got bogged down by the "message" It's a good message. I just wanted more story. On the other hand, I like the characters. So, I give myself permission to skim all the

religious issues. Update: It was impossible to skim the religious issues. By the end of the book I didn't even care about the characters any more. I should have stuck with my original decision to bail.

David Fields says

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed this book. Not only did it have me laughing out loud, but the serious topics of the novel left me feeling as frustrated as the main character. It is a true 'love against the odds' tale, but at the same time is a reflection of our society and the inequality shown towards the gay community. With DOMA, DADT and Immigration being addressed, as well as how the Christian fundamentalists wield such power in our country, it is almost impossible as a gay man not to connect to this novel on some level.

***** SPOILER *****

The end of the book is rather abrupt. The villain of the story comes around at a pace that I found, at the time of reading, a little unbelievable. However, on reflection and after re-reading the chapter I wonder whether my initial reaction was wrong. The reasons for her actions, and her ultimate confession, left the main character with a choice. He could either punish her for her behavior, which would have gone against his love for his partner, or he could let it go and not beat her around the head with it. I am not too sure whether I would have been so gracious as Greg, and if I was honest, and out of a selfish want of wanting to read more, I would have loved for him to have his sharp tongue slice into her even more. But this wouldn't have suited his character. Although the turn around was fast, I was pleased that it didn't tint my opinion of him as, up to that point I found him likable and funny as hell. After spending so many years attempting to protect his partner of his mother's betrayal, I think any more of a show-down would have left me feeling that Greg's protection and love of Danny wasn't as real as it seemed.

Overall, this was an excellent story.

Highly recommended.

T.A. Webb says

Greg Stephens is happy with his life. He's still a young man, gets to visit exotic locations as part of his job as a flight crew attendant, and has great friends. He's got a veddy proper English accent, which lands him in as many guys' beds as he wants. So it's a bit of a surprise when, at the end of accompanying a flight of troops to

the Middle East, he walks into a bar and sees a handsome blonde Navy man who hits all his hot buttons.

Danny Taylor is out with some fellow officers, having a drink, when he looks up and sees a good-looking man walk in. When the man works his way to Danny's table with his beautiful female companion, he just has to strike up a conversation with him. And while the packaging and accent and smile all float his boat, it's Greg's ridiculous sense of humor and good heart that prompt him to ask Greg out to dinner the next night.

So at the height of DADT (Don't Ask Don't Tell), Greg starts a circumspect and unlikely romance with the semi-closeted Navy man. Despite the fact that he's a British citizen, that he's in a different country every week, that he's very concerned about his widowed mother and not over the loss of his father, and that he's really not looking for something long-term, he flat-out falls in love with the strong, intelligent and sexy gentle man.

Oh. Then he meets Danny's mother. And...then other shoe drops.

Because the born-again, church-going, Steel Magnolia of a Texas mother takes a very distinct dislike to her son's boyfriend, and begins a well-choreographed campaign of quiet terrorism against him.

Will Greg maintain his famous British stiff upper lip and try to keep the peace between Danny and his mother, or will he give in to the overwhelming odds stacked against the couple?

This book is straight-up fantastic. Greg Hogben doesn't fool me for one minute - he snarks, gripes and all but bitch-slaps us with funny one-liners and droll humor, but what really shines through like the sun in this great big ol' Valentine of a book is his huge loving heart.

This is a romance, make no mistake. Pure and simple romance. Sure, there are parts where I had to put my Kindle down because I was laughing so hard, and other parts that choked me up. But this book made a direct connection with my heart, grabbing hold of it from the first encounter where Greg and Danny meet. The easy and predictable thing would have been to have them meet eyes across the crowded bar and sneak off for a quick romp, then falls instantly in love.

No.

Mr. Hogben takes us on a long, scenic drive in the country instead, showing us all the little things that creep up on a man when we look up and find ourselves in love. He lets us see the small jokes, the intimate moments and silly phone calls, the in-jokes between two guys that make us giggle-snort but that nobody else gets. The million thoughts that run through our heads when we meet our guy's family and friends and have those WTH moments.

But most of all, he shows us the ups and down, the petty things we do when we are ticked off and regret, then the quiet regrets that always bring us back to the one we love. The everyday thing that add up to a month, a year, then five, seven.

Most remarkably, he shows us all this care, this love, without opening the bedroom door. Oh, there's no doubt these two men are wearing the mattress, sofa, and probably the kitchen counters out with hot times, but we don't need these...distractions. This is a LOVE story, not a sex story.

And damn, if that wasn't refreshing.

I loved this book. At a particularly hard time in my life, this came along like a soothing balm and made me remember how and why love matters.

I couldn't have asked for more.

Buy this book.

Tom

Amos Lassen says

Hogben, Greg. "The British Devil", Dreamspinner Books, 2012

Culture, Religion, Love

Amos Lassen

Greg Stephens and Danny Taylor are lovers but their relationship has a few problems. Greg is British and a flight attendant while Danny is an American naval officer. They live in different places and Don't Ask, Don't Tell is still being enforced and immigration does not look favorably at gay men who want to relocate. As bad as these two issues are, there is a third more personal problem and that is Danny's born again Christian mother, Vivien, who is very upset about her son's sexuality and is determined to have him join her in worship. She is intent on getting Danny back and will do anything to make sure that happens. Greg, on the other hand, is determined to win his boyfriend and to keep him. Minor issues such as cultural issues and indeed minor and a battle for Danny's heart and soul takes place.

Greg Hogben does a wonderful job of portraying emotions in his first novel. I met Hogben when we sat together at this year's Lambda Literary Awards and he told me how nervous he was about the release of his first novel and even though I had not yet read it, I told him that he had nothing to worry about and indeed he does not. While the story is not new, Hogben relates it to us in a way that he pulls us in on the first page and he keeps us turning pages as quickly as we can. He gives us some very real characters who deal with problems that many of us either face or have faced and even though Don't Ask, Don't Tell is no longer with us, we get a look at how things were not so long ago.

The story begins simply enough when Greg and Danny meet at a bar in Bahrain and Danny falls quickly for Greg's sense of humor and also finds his British accent charming. Greg also falls for Danny who is somewhat closeted because of his position with the military. Then he meets Danny's mother and....

Vivien does not like Greg and she begins her campaign of returning her son to the straight and narrow. I must say that Hogben has a great sense of humor and we find that all through this book. While the book is a romance, some of the lines are the funniest I have read in a long time. Yet there is sensitivity here as well. If I did not know that was a first book, I would have thought that the author had been writing for a very long time. The way he handles emotions and humor is wonderful. The romance here is sweet like when Greg and

Danny go on a long drive after they meet instead of hopping right into the sack. Hogben alternates humor with intimacy and this is very special. The men are young and in love and we certainly see ourselves as young lovers in the repartee they share. What makes this so amazing is that there is no sex and while we are sure the two are enjoying each other's bodies, we do not read about it. It is tacitly understood. It is quite a surprise to read a romantic novel without sex.

Greg is the narrator and he takes us through the three year long distance courtship of himself and Danny. After Danny leaves the service he goes home to study law in Texas and this, of course, puts a bit of a strain on the relationship especially since Greg knows how Danny's mother feels about him. The guys face many obstacles in their long distance love affair including Vivien, immigration, religion, culture and the distance. While the book does come to an abrupt end, it allows us to believe that a sequel is coming which for me is very good news. I love when a book makes me feel something and the sense of uneasiness that I felt when I read, I discovered to be a sense of frustration that I felt for both men. Now I see why the author did that and it certainly made me care about the characters. I also appreciate Hogben's social commentary on the way we live and it made the story all the more personal for me. Hogben is British and his views on American gay life are well represented here. Greg Hogben has taken a beautiful swan dive into the pool of gay writing and I give him ten points. He is someone to watch, mark my words. I do not say that often and I have yet to be proven wrong.

Jerry says

4.5 stars.

The blurb captures the essence of the book without giving away the whole of it.

The author has created a very real plot with fully fleshed out characters. Some of the scenes were too realistic for me as they were too close to home. There were times when reading this that I actively sought out other books to read I was that uncomfortable. The climactic scene was written well with its arguments on both sides. It was probably over the top for real life, but made for a great stage moment. Actually this could actually make a great stage play.

The flight attendant's situations, their thoughts and work life rang very true to me. I have over 20 long haul flights a year and can vouch for this. I grew up in a very conservative evangelical family so I know where Danny and his family were coming from. My husband of 34 years has not ever come out to his parents, but very early in they "knew". For the longest time I was dreading a scene like in the book, but apparently his parents have made peace with this. There are still times when they want a family photo of just Tim and them, which still hurts that they don't really consider me to be part of their "true" family. (Obviously thus was one of the tough moments in the book that was very real and hard to read for me personally. In my own family I have had to fight for acceptance, which was grudgingly given at times by parents and siblings. Yet my brothers kids haven't had a problem with us at all, nor surprisingly my grandmother who immediately considered Tim "one of the family". I chalk it up to generational differences. I have also grappled with the jealousy of past boyfriends and sometimes still deal with those issues. My Tim teaches at university and is surrounded by cute college twinks. Hard to take when one perceives oneself as "aging". My company's home office is in Dallas, TX so I know some of what that is about in the book. When I joined the company in 1990 I made sure that the owner knew I was gay and in a relationship as I didn't want any issues. Internally there weren't any. Externally a gay man I was working with on a project in Japan said I had to pretend to be straight for our client. I did so at first, then decided I couldn't hide that part of me and the client was very accepting. So the closeted gay sentiment by conservatives in the book also rang very true for me as well.

Summing up, I very much recommend the book. I think some of the scenes are over exaggerated. Mostly very real.

Vio says

3.5 stars

It took me a while to get into this story and it was enjoyable to a point. Greg and Danny's relationship for the most part is an interesting journey, they have their ups and downs like most couples only with the added stress of the obsessed, religious mother-in-law. What I really missed was the intimacy between Greg and Danny, the actual wooing and romance. I would have thought after their many separations there might have been at least some kisses and tender caresses, a bit more togetherness would have been a lovely addition. It was a witty, cleverly written story and I loved the provocative take on some of those questionable beliefs. My only other niggle was the 180 degree turnaround Vivien had from evil bitch to loving mother-in-law it was too sudden to be believable.

Roger Kean says

Greg Stephens and Danny Taylor's relationship reads as a very heartfelt story, full of insights of what love at a great distance must be—the physical distance that is, as well as across the great divide of culture. The writing is assured, mixing angst with wit, conflict with humor, and all under-layered with the sort of descriptions which are usually only gained through observation rather than only research.

The culture-language clash between the very secular British Greg and the Texan Danny—from an ultra-conservative Southern Baptist family—sits at the novel's core and it is their enjoyment in the discovery of cultural differences and similarities which gives it so much heart. It is hard to avoid some wonder at Danny's long-suffering tolerance toward his mother, but whenever it feels like a break up must be coming between he and Greg, Danny smooths it over. In another (probably M/M novel) this would have been the cue for a Big Misunderstanding and the fact that it wasn't underlines that this is a "real gay man's" story—and one, however, with no explicitly erotic scenes at all.

Hogben creates a fine cast-list of characters, from main to secondary and tertiary, and weaves an aura about Danny's fanatically religious mother Vivien that she comes to rival Cruella de Vil... which predicates the culmination of the social-religious clash between she and Greg; and this is the weakest element of the novel—not for what it represents or even how it's expressed, but in the unconvincing suddenness of her bid for redemption. The turn-around from her seeing Greg as Satan stealing away her son to accepting their gay relationship is so abrupt one is led to suspect a sneaky plot device to shock, like the ending of *Friday the 13th* or many other horror movies. But being the book it is, this isn't the case, simply a writer running out of space to make a more convincing change of heart. Perhaps the coda would have been more satisfactory had Vivien been only grudgingly accepting of her son's relationship with Greg... but then it wouldn't have been such a happy ending.

Endings are always a difficulty and maybe authors should not be excoriated when they opt for a full-scale happy one, but the naming of the adopted boy (view spoiler) goes a step too far, even allowing for a touch of that famous British irony. Notwithstanding the last chapter, *The British Devil* is a fine novel and a great read.
