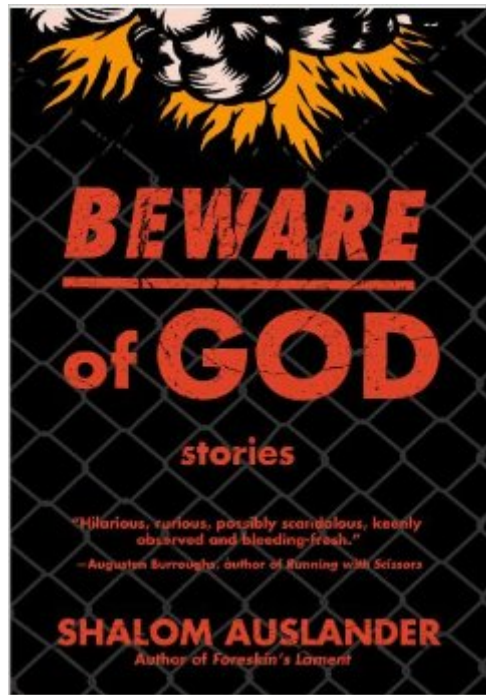


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Beware Of God: Stories



Synopsis

Shalom Auslander's stories in *Beware of God* have the mysterious punch of a dream. They are wide ranging and inventive: A young Jewish man's inexplicable transformation into a very large, blond, tattooed goy ends with an argument over whether or not his father can beat his unclean son with a copy of the Talmud. A pious man having a near-death experience discovers that God is actually a chicken, and he's forced to reconsider his life -- and his diet. At God's insistence, Leo Schwartzman searches Home Depot for supplies for an ark. And a young boy mistakes Holocaust Remembrance Day as emergency preparedness training for the future. Auslander draws upon his upbringing in an Orthodox Jewish community in New York State to craft stories that are filled with shame, sex, God, and death, but also manage to be wickedly funny and poignant.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book doesn't attack religion so much as what some people have done to it. By placing dogmatic thinking in other situations the stories show how ridiculous this thinking is. Two hamsters argue about whether their owner is omniscient. Rabbis argue about letting a man with a Jewish head and Christian body into a synagogue. A religious war breaks out in the Peanuts comic strip. I want to buy 20 copies of this book and pass them out to everyone I know.

Shalom Auslander succeeds in never boring the reader, although one may argue the shorts stories are variations on the same theme: the idiocy of some (most?) orthodox Jewish (and for that matter,

any religious) beliefs and practices. Besides being hilarious, this book will make you pause and wonder: "am I really a (willing) victim of such a preposterous construction?". This book will not only amuse you; it will also make you more critical, and probably a tad smarter.

It's one thing to believe the message. It's another to worship the creed. Here's a collection of short, stark and funny parables about the futility short cuts to the bosom of Abraham. These are characters trapped in cul de sacs of legalistic fretting, and the god portrayed here in the one that would have to exist to make all this theological maneuvering something other than absurd and pointless -- a smug CEO, frustrated with his penny-ante creations and bound by his own legalistic mind. It's a funny book, a ding on the vanities and motivations of hyperobservant followers everywhere. Not just Orthodox Jews.

I'm not Jewish but I found myself identifying with the overall sense of this book - the sense of religion being completely ridiculous. Auslander mocks many conventions of traditional Jewish religion but to me, it's also a reminder of the ridiculousness of many rituals and beliefs in other religions such as Catholicism. (I was raised Catholic so I feel qualified to comment upon this religion.) It's not a book for everyone and those with no sense of humor, sense of irreverence or sense of the inaccuracy of written history will hate this book, consider it sacrilegious, and no doubt condemn it without having ever read it. But I thought it was well written and some stories were downright hysterical. Who are any of us to say how God would react if here on Earth with Death to preside over a botched death sentence? I liken it to the anti-Bible, though that may be oversimplifying the book. But as a non-Jew, I found this book as funny, fascinating, significant and irreverent as anyone raised in the religion. For another great read in the same vein, read Christopher Moore's "Lamb," a work of fiction about the life of Christ as told by his childhood friend Biff. You will be wiping away tears of laughter.

I found this book very refreshing and well written. Auslander is very precise and incisive with his language and images and while it may fall a bit on the side of mocking its characters, overall I found the book imaginative and illuminating about the foibles of the Jewish world.

This is a truly amazing book. Using satire and humor, Auslander demonstrates to the reader the difficulty and sometimes absurdity of living life as an orthodox Jew. The characters in these stories are filled with conflicting emotions which can never be settled- the Orthodox Jew can never be

completely happy because his life is full of guilt and fear. Guilt of sins and fear of punishment. Fear of missing out on Heaven or being responsible for another Holocaust. In one story, a young boy both enjoys exploring his sexuality and feels terribly guilty for doing so at the same time. The most brilliant story, in my opinion, is "Holocaust Tips for Kids". The author lets us into the mind of an orthodox child who has been totally inundated with precise and gory facts about the Holocaust throughout his school year while at the same time being taught by his Rabbis that Jewish sins are responsible for God's causing the Holocaust. The result is a child who performs Judaism out of fear of causing another Holocaust while constantly thinking of escape routes and hiding places in case a Holocaust does occur. I think this book shows us the schizophrenic personality which an Orthodox Jew must exhibit. On the one hand, there is the reality of this world- its worldly pleasures such as sex, money, and happiness; its suffering such as death and illness. The Orthodox Jew, like any human, enjoys the pleasures and hates the suffering. On the other hand is his Orthodox religious outlook which teaches to be wary of worldly pleasures (they are sinful or can lead to sin) and to embrace suffering as the mysterious work of a loving God. These stories are funny but unfortunately some people live such lives and that is not funny.

I read practically the entire book in one sitting; it's hard to put down. These short, well-crafted stories are filled with memorable moments and lines, as well as a sincere and irreverent take on the whole God 'issue'. As a non-Jew, some (many, actually) references bypassed me completely, yet there was plenty more of the book to enjoy. This is a book that you'll find yourself rereading several times - and it'll still be funny. Of course, the humorless will find things to criticize, but there's no pleasing some people and happily Auslander didn't try.

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