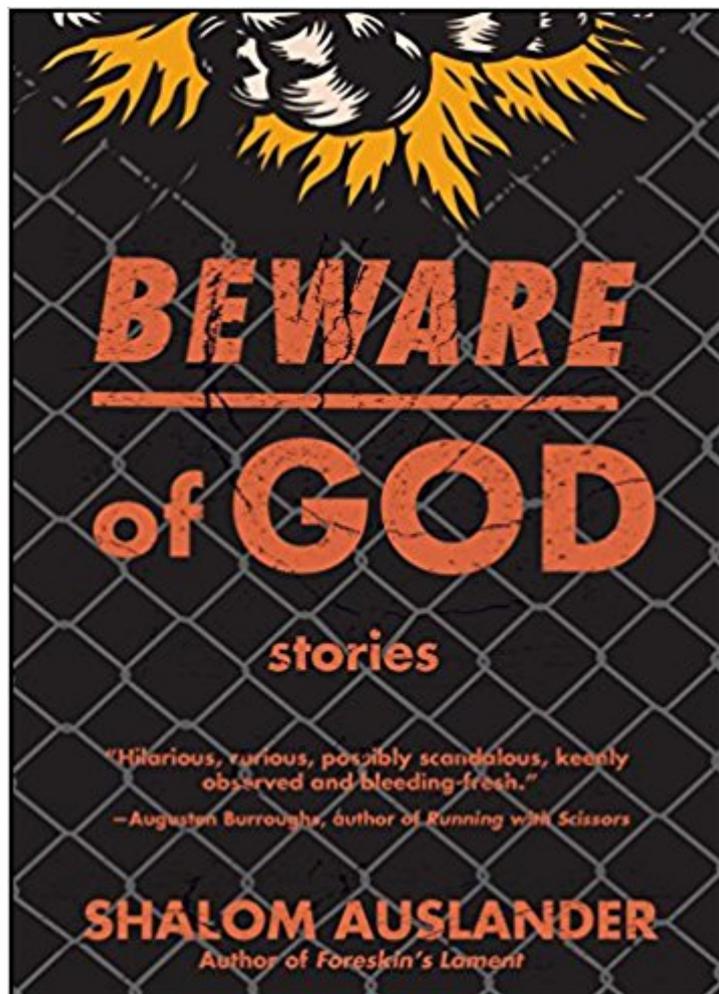


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Beware Of God: Stories



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

The faithful look sharp or fall victim to a "surly, bossy, paranoid, violent" God in Auslander's satirical debut collection. The author, raised an Orthodox Jew, mercilessly spoofs the Old Testament deity: God suffers from migraines, stalks a modern-day prophet and appears as a large chicken, among other incarnations. Though harsh rabbinic voices echo throughout, and characters who engage in Talmudic-style debate usually arrive at absurd conclusions, Auslander's target isn't religious hypocrisy. Instead, he guns for sacred cows: literal interpretations of the Torah, strict adherence to Jewish law, and belief in an all-powerful deity who metes out punishment and reward according to man's fulfillment of God's commandments. At the heart of this satire, though, is the pain of true

believers at the mercy of a capricious God. These are high-concept stories: a chimpanzee suddenly achieves "total conscious self-awareness.... God. Death. Shame. Guilt" — a burden he cannot bear. A yeshiva student wakes one morning with a brawny, goyishe body and is reviled by his community. A man enrages all major world religions with his discovery of original Old Testament tablets preceded by the disclaimer, "The following is a work of fiction." Occasionally, the Catskills-inflected comedy is corny, but for the most part, Auslander skillfully handles heavy subject matter with a droll tone. "Beautiful day," an adman says, making small talk at a pitch meeting with God. " 'I made it myself,' God answered loudly." (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This first short story collection is approachable and entertaining on many levels, because it includes a strange and either funny or disturbing cast of characters, all of whom explore, in one way or another, their connection to the universe and the Almighty. The first story, "The War of the Bernsteins," pits a technically pious man against his rebellious and frustrated wife, and the descriptions of their internal "spiritual mathematics" is reminiscent of some of Woody Allen's short pieces. "Holocaust Tips for Kids" is, as expected, chilling and maudlin but also somehow humbling, putting everything in an unusual perspective. Some of the other stories seem to verge on gimmicky, but for the most part, Auslander avoids cheap laughs, his point in these stories being that all of us, deeply observant of our faith or not, take the doctrine and ritualistic trappings of organized religion far too seriously. Debi Lewis Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

You needn't be Jewish or have the thinnest veneer of understanding of Jewish orthodoxy to enjoy, nay, love "Beware of God." Better than just hilariously entertaining, the stories are thought-provoking and relevant. To be sure, each launches from a patently absurd proposition. That is the point. Between laughs, the fearless and intellectually honest will find application to any dogma-driven group, religious or otherwise, within their own sphere. I have a keen appreciation for laying bare religious abuses via humor and sarcasm, thanks to my experience as the as-told-to-author of former Mormon polygamist wife Joanne Hanks's snarky memoir, "It's Not About the Sex My Ass." I cannot recommend "Beware of God" highly enough. Your only disappointment will be that there isn't more of it.

I first heard Shalom Auslander on *This American Life*, and I enjoyed that segment enough to check out the book. I was not disappointed. The stories are unique and well-crafted, but mostly they are clever and thoughtful. They're funny and interesting, and that's what I was looking for. I enjoyed these stories, and I plan to seek out more Auslander in the future.

Comedic, satiric, fantastical to extreme, rude, heretical, wise . . . a thoroughly winning collection of short and short-short tales sometimes mere minor jests sometimes skirting profound. Highly recommendable.

I know, I know, the first couple of stories feel very lazy towards the end, like the writing got tired of writing and tried to wrap everything up in a nice, neat, literary bow. But trust me, stick with Auslander! He is a master of his craft and the stories get much better as the book goes on. In addition, his novel *Hope: A Tragedy* is one of the most clever/funniest novels I have read in a long, long time. His *Memoir*...eh, not bad, but his fiction is amazing.

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.

This thin volume of stories is the funniest stuff I've read since discovering Woody Allen's writings more than 30 years ago. Knowing of my irreverent nature, a friend copied a story from it and gave it to me. I took it and read it while getting my car washed. People at the car wash must have thought I was crazy because, while reading, I was laughing out loud so hard. And it is not only funny; it can be profoundly thought-provoking. I want to buy a case of "Beware of God" and give it to my friends. I also want to drop off copies at the exits to all the Creationist theme parks. God knows they need a laugh.

Brilliant, the comedy I have come to love and expect from Shalom Auslander.

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.

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