



## I Shudder and Other Reactions to Life, Death, and New Jersey

*Paul Rudnick*

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*I Shudder* is a side-splittingly funny collection of essays from Paul Rudnick, one of America's preeminent humorists. Rudnick, who writes for *The New Yorker* and has written the screenplays for the films *In and Out*, *Sister Act*, and *Addams Family Values*, shares his hilarious observations on life in New York City and New Jersey, the perils of show business, and dealing with one's family, however crazy they may be. As David Sedaris says, "There's no book wiser or half as funny as *I Shudder*."

## I Shudder and Other Reactions to Life, Death, and New Jersey Details

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## **From Reader Review I Shudder and Other Reactions to Life, Death, and New Jersey for online ebook**

### **Stuart says**

I found this book to be just about perfect for a coast to coast flight. There was enough variety to keep me interested, a mix of journalism, memoir, and short fiction. Through it all, there were zingers every fourth page or so that made me laugh out loud.

I'm not a fan of David Sedaris; he's too mean and arch for my taste. In contrast, Rudnick is very sweet both in his portrayals of his family and in his discussions of people in and out of show biz. He doesn't have a mean bone in his body. Rudnick's use of language is always precise and he knows how to write a good sentence.

Plus, here's one thing I didn't expect. His gay perspective on things as pedestrian as those wedding blurbs and photos in the Sunday NY Times (which I read religiously) gave me a window into a different way of thinking. The only thing I found off-putting in this book was Rudnick's discussion of his eating habits Yuck! The man is killing himself. I don't know how he's made it past forty, I really don't. There are some details about a person's life that are best left unsaid even when it comes to memoirs.

Aside from reading about Rudnick's self-destructive nutritional ways - I'm sure we'll hear about his 12 step program and recovery some day - this book is a hoot.

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### **Lindsay says**

I sort of borrowed this book on a whim from the library since Paul Rudnick has written so many movies I love, I figured an insight, and his writing, would be a hoot. I didn't really get into it. The Sister Act chapter was really interesting, but I found myself skimming, outright skipping chapters, or not really getting into the humour very much. I eventually let the library hold expire and never bothered to renew it since I had no desire to finish it.

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### **Lara says**

I don't quite know what to say about the book. I liked it, but didn't looooove it - but I'm hesitant to say that because I'm beginning to suspect that I simply don't "looooooove" any sort of memoir/collection of essays type of book, and I fear that my criticism is more one of genre than of the book itself. I chose this book partly because it's fun to make fun of New Jersey (even though they DO sell beer, wine, and liquor all in one store as opposed to Stupid Pennsylvania) and partly because I figured that it was bound to be funny since the author wrote the screenplay for the movie In & Out and I laughed a lot in it. The essays in the book fit a few different categories: (1) general wit and wisdom; (2) anecdotes about famous people and making movies and plays and stuff; and (3) what I presume are fiction vignettes from the "diary" of a character named Elyot Vionnet. In general, I loved the essays that fell into categories 1 and 3 and found myself skimming those in category 2.

There's no denying that Paul Rudnick is a funny dude, and his book makes me want to go back in time so I can participate in some of his escapades (most notably, I would like to attend the party his friend William threw at The Chelsea Hotel. I'd also like to meet William's sister Laura), but I'd also be content just to have a drink with the guy one day. Anyone who subsists on treats like Peeps is pretty ace in my book.

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### **Lobstergirl says**

I picked this up at the library because Rudnick is one of the few actually funny writers in the *New Yorker's* humor column. Here's a sample (not in the book) from the January 27, 2014 issue, titled *New Jersey: the Quiz*:

5. *The slogan of New Jersey's capital, which appears in glowing letters on one of the city's bridges, is "Trenton Makes, the World Takes." What were the three runners-up?*

(a) "Trenton Pees, the World Sees."

(b) "Trenton Poops, the World Scoops."

(c) "If You Lived in Trenton, You'd Be Home Now So You Could Kill Yourself."

6. *The past three elected New Jersey governors have all broken their legs while in office. James McGreevey, the state's proud gay American governor, broke his while strolling on a Cape May beach. How will Chris Christie break his leg?*

(a) Kicking one of his aides.

(b) Running from a subpoena.

(c) Putting on his pants.

The pieces included here are unevenly funny, and include slice-of-life, biographically-based comedy as well as fictional stories (episodes in the life of a strange Manhattanite named Elyot Vionnet). The funniest bits relate to Rudnick's status as a gay man with a loving but overbearing Jewish family, and his boyfriend, a non-Jewish doctor.

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### **Stephanie Shannon says**

Hilarious

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### **Kater Cheek says**

I don't know why this book was so funny, but within four pages I was laughing out loud. Not just titters, but full-on brays of laughter. Rudnick's humor grows slowly and comes out of nowhere. Do all his friends have a

knack for saying the worst possible thing, or does he just remember the stories that way? I don't know. Either way, this book made me laugh consistently and frequently, and I can always use the chuckles.

One thing I didn't like: interspersed with the memoir-type anecdotes were fictional pieces about someone named Violette something or other. I read one and a half of these and was so uninterested that I skipped the rest of them. Didn't appeal to me at all.

Most fascinating fact: Paul Rudnick lives off nothing but junk food. Never eats meat or vegetables. I find this fascinating, and it gives me hope that my picky child might not starve.

I'd recommend this book for people who like David Sedaris, because the humor is similar, if not quite as bitter and bizarre.

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### **Ivan says**

Paul Rudnick is the celebrated writer of novels, plays (Jeffrey), and screenplays (In & Out, Sister Act, Addams Family Values), I Shudder is his first collection. If you enjoy David Sedaris and Dan Savage, you're going to love this; one of the funniest damn books I've ever read.

This isn't just one of those collections of "funny stories" about my wacky family. Rudnick has had a fabulous career, he knows everyone who's anyone, and has the supreme talent to report his observations honestly and without cynicism, which doesn't mean he can't deliver a sharp barb or bitter jab. Included here are tales of working (whoring) in Hollywood as a screenwriter and script-doctor. He writes lovingly about tyrannical out producer Scott Rudin, Bette Midler and Debbie Reynolds. There is a truly unflattering portrait of egomaniacal actor Nicol Williamson's crazy antics on stage and off during the run of Rudnick's I Hate Hamlet. There are fictional (?) diary entries interspersed by the deliciously droll (and homicidal) Elyot Vionnet (which are quite cynical and depraved). Throughout the volume Rudnick harkens back to his New Jersey family. Oh, yes, he is adept at highlighting their many foibles and eccentricities. However, what comes through in generous amounts is the genuine sense of love, and tolerance (if not out right acceptance) they all have for one another.

Rudnick is funny; very funny, and is every bit the raconteur that Sedaris and Savage are. I've had a pretty dreadful month (the death of both my father and a close friend), and I Shutter came right at the right moment for me, uplifting my spirits, inducing broad smiles and much, much laughter; just what the doctor prescribed.

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### **Jennifer Campaniolo says**

A funny collection of essays, although the subtitle is a little misleading. I thought he was going to talk more about NJ than he did. Being raised there, I would have loved to have read his take on the most maligned yet, ironically, the most populated state. He also did a bit of name-dropping, which I wasn't expecting. I feel like there was more talk of his life in Hollywood than anything else which got tiresome because there are already a glut of tempestuous celebrity stories out there.

But those complaints aside, he's a comic writer right up there with the two guys who blurb the book: David Sedaris and Steve Martin. And I loved the parody of Brooklynites in "I Shudder: Mr. Christmas"--it was spot on. I love Brooklyn, but the hipster family he writes about is definitely annoying...and not much of an

exaggeration.

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### **Al says**

"Christmas...is a season of excessive credit-heavy spending, painfully awkward get-togethers with people we never liked to begin with, and the torture of children by never giving them enough gifts to satisfy their amoral, venal natures. The only appropriate holiday tokens would be to give every member of one's family a crossbow and a head start." If you find that comment trenchant then Paul Rudnick's "I Shudder" is the book for you. Actually the observation is made by his writing alter-ego Elyot Vionnet, a stuffy, superior New Yorker, but just like Rudnick's more famous alter-ego, movie columnist Libby Gelman-Waxner ("Entertainment Weekly" and the late "Premiere"), the reader is in on the joke. Less than half of "I Shudder" is the insufferable Vionnet, the rest are very funny essays on show business types (actor Nicol Williamson, "In and Out" producer Scott Rudnick, Broadway costume designer William Ivey Long, agent Helen Merrill and "Grease" producer Allan Carr). Though chapters on the not-so-famous, Rudnick's family and friends, are just as funny. If you've enjoyed Paul Rudnick's writing in other media, you'll enjoy this book, too. Recommended.

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### **John says**

Two words: wildly uneven

Overall, I liked the Elliot Vionet stories; Rudnick skewers NYC arrivistes to a tee (although I could've done without the morbidity).

The segment regarding his trip to a convent in search of the girl who gave up a promising acting career to become a nun was pretty good, but I fast-forwarded through pretty much everything else show-biz related.

As someone (roughly) the same age who grew up in New Jersey, his childhood anecdotes pretty much fell flat on me. Moreover, even if they had been more interesting, that angle only covers a small part of the selections.

He's at his best in the stories featuring life in The City - how the AIDS crises affected him personally was well done, but the last section, centering on his friend William's life at the Chelsea Hotel was brilliant (It became obvious at the end of those tales that William is fictitious, but based the events themselves are likely based on real events).

My library had the audio available as an instant download, but a waiting list for the actual book, so no choice for me there. However, I was left conflicted as to which version would've worked out better? I would've loved the print book in order to skim through (skip) the Hollywood, show biz stuff, and he didn't seem to invest much emotion into the narration of his family life (including the opening scene of his family's visit to his first studio walkup in Manhattan), saving that up as though a finite resource, for Elliot's antics, the AIDS crisis and The Chelsea Hotel tales.

Bottom line, kids ... you're on your own here for a recommendation!

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### **Jeruen says**

I should say that this is a hilarious book. It's a hybrid book, where the author mixes fiction and non-fiction in between chapters. The full title of this book is *I Shudder And Other Reactions to Life, Death, and New Jersey*. I didn't realize that this book would be a great read, and a comic one as well.

So I suppose it's better to talk about the author here, Paul Rudnick. Apparently, he is a playwright, a novelist, and a screenplay writer. So he has written several movies, including *Sister Act* and *In & Out*. So the non-fiction parts of the book basically is him narrating all the comic things that occur while he was working on these projects.

He also narrates about his friends in New York City, and about his family as well. Of course, in these narrations, real-life people occur, and I always get curious as to whether these people really existed. So when he narrated his friendship with William Ivey Long, who was a costume designer who for a time lived in the Chelsea Hotel, I went to Wikipedia and looked it up. When he was narrating about the time he spent in *Sister Act* and how he did research on it, I came across Dolores Hart and how she used to be an actress who is now a nun, and now is the only nun who is able to vote on the Academy Awards. I googled her as well, and sure enough, it's a true story.

Interspersed with these non-fiction chapters are several fiction chapters that are always entitled *I Shudder*, and subtitled with the topic of the chapter. All of the fictional chapters narrate the life of a certain Elyot Vionnet, who is this somehow bizarre character, kinda superhuman, and at the same time, rather cruel. I especially liked the first time Elyot appeared, when he was watching this girl who was always on her phone, and how Elyot criticized this girl's phone habits. Elyot stalks the girl, and calls the girl, convincing to let go of the phone for a week, and observe her surroundings instead and see what she is missing. She tries it for a week, and then decides to meet Elyot. The girl first tells Elyot that she saw wonders. Elyot was about to tell the girl You're welcome when the girl turns around and complains to him that the girl saw flaws and bad things happened after she let go of her phone. In the end, the girl blames Elyot for this, and immediately picks up her phone again. At the exact same time, the girl gets run over by a tour bus, because she wasn't looking, and ironically, the people riding the bus gets out their phones and takes a picture of her, so that they can send it to their relatives in Oslo.

Anyway, I guess I am not doing any justice by trying to describe the humor, one should read this book for himself. But I have to say, this is perhaps one of the few books that I actually laughed out loud while reading it. The way his humor works, it is unbelievable. It's a weird sense of humor, and since I am not well-versed in humor typology, I don't know of a better way to describe it.

Let's say I am giving this 4.5 out of 5 stars. That's high enough to show that this is one good book to read.

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### **Allison says**

This book would have been ten times more enjoyable if it eliminated all of the biographical entries and read straight through the chapters subtitled "An Excerpt from the Most Deeply Intimate and Personal Diary of One Elyot Vionnet." As it is written, *I Shudder* ends up as an amalgamation of David Sedaris-type writing

that doesn't quite hit the mark, in part because the chapters are so chronologically ill-ordered, because they are interrupted by these fictional "diary" chapters (which I actually ended up preferring to the real-life accounts), and . . . well . . . because Paul Rudnick is not David Sedaris. Rudnick has his own way of recounting humorous moments, but he also tends to get caught up in reciting we-were-here-doing-this details that slow down the narrative and put set the humor off pace. Once the reader starts skipping paragraphs, it's hard to get them laughing again.

The chapters from the "diary of Elyot Vionnet," however, are downright hilarious. The narrator--Elyot Vionnet--is fully developed and has a very clear voice (almost too clear, to the point of annoying the reader with his attitude, in fact). The details of the narrative are poignant and support exactly the points the character is trying to make as he narrates each episode in his life. This is clearly the stronger section of the book and, had it been developed and published independently, may have reached an entirely different sort of audience than *I Shudder* did.

All in all, Rudnick's work is certainly not a waste of time. David Sedaris and Billy Bryson fans would enjoy the book, along with book junkies who love reading about life and culture in the Big Apple. After all, there's nothing like living in and writing from Jersey to make a NY reader *shudder*.

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### **Americanogig says**

A collection of autobiographical short stories by Paul Rudnick held together with fictional diary entries by one Elyot Violett. Although I enjoyed Mr. Rudnick's stories to a decent extent (especially the views of a couple celebrities), Elyot's dramatized version of life in NYC was much more interesting to read. The first entry is my favorite-

He can't help but notice a 30s-ish neighbor who is constantly on her cellphone, rudely ignoring everything going on around her. He decides to call her and lay down some truths about her life which she eventually takes to heart. After much coaxing she puts down the mobile parasite constantly attached to her skull and notices some great things about the area where she lives. Elyot is vindicated and excited! Then she tells him that she also never noticed how gross cabs were, didn't have an excuse not to be bothered in the street, she relates how her friends dropped her because they thought she was ignoring them. The man he encouraged her to abandon her texting for turns out to be not so great. With one last stinger she picks up her phone and starts heading across the street when she is hit and killed by a vehicle. She is buried with her cell and Elyot still calls her, seeming to gain a strange satisfaction in imaging the ringing in the casket and his voice echoing in the sepulcher.

Did I completely spoil that story for you? Maybe. There are so many others to read that you may as well stop your whining, because I'm not going to feel bad.

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### **Judith says**

The author is a successful screenwriter and playwright and I really enjoyed reading the chapters in which he skewers Hollywood. (he wrote: *In& Out*; *Adams Family Values*; *Sister Act*) He is also downright hilarious in many parts of the book. There are other parts that are deadly dull and just plain silly, so it's hard to

characterize this book. Like David Sedaris, much of his work is based on his own family and his experiences as a gay writer living in NYC. The vignettes about himself and his family were interesting and fun.

The fictional pieces which appear at first to be nonfiction didn't appeal to me. For example, one piece appears to be a journalistic investigation searching for Christmas spirit which he finds in Kansas where a large extended family has gathered to celebrate. The reason behind their great joyful celebration is that at the end of the night they pick names to decide which member of the family will be run down and cannibalized. And there are a number of chapters like this wherein the reader is lead to believe that the author is talking about an experience he had at someone's house and then the characters start shooting at each other. I guess it could be funny, but it wasn't.

Still there are enough really good chapters to make this book delightful entertainment when you just want a laugh.

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### **Erin says**

Some funny stories - I especially enjoyed the diary entries of "Elyot Vionnet"; great for a pick-me-up read of a collection of short stories

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