



# Lullaby

*Chuck Palahniuk*

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## **Lullaby** Chuck Palahniuk

Carl Streator is a reporter investigating Sudden Infant Death Syndrome for a soft-news feature. After responding to several calls with paramedics, he notices that all the dead children were read the same poem from the same library book the night before they died. It's a 'culling song' - an ancient African spell for euthanising sick or old people. Researching it, he meets a woman who killed her own child with it accidentally. He himself accidentally killed his own wife and child with the same poem twenty years earlier. Together, the man and the woman must find and destroy all copies of this book, and try not to kill every rude sonofabitch that gets in their way. *Lullaby* is a comedy/drama/tragedy. In that order. It may also be Chuck Palahniuk's best book yet.

## **Lullaby Details**

Date : Published June 5th 2003 by Vintage (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780099437963

Author : Chuck Palahniuk

Format : Paperback 260 pages

Genre : Fiction, Horror, Contemporary, Fantasy, Novels, Thriller, Literature, American, Dark, Adult

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## **From Reader Review Lullaby for online ebook**

### **Lyn says**

Eudora Welty once said something to the effect that Southern gothic works because people in the South can still recognize grotesque.

Chuck Palahniuk may be the vanguard of the post-modern gothic literary group as he can definitely recognize what is grotesque in our culture. "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me" is an old saying that Palahniuk dissects and violates with an impish joy usually only seen in 8th grade biology.

Centered around the unfortunate discovery of an old African culling song that can kill when read (or thought) Palahniuk creates a loose allegory that examines how our saturation with noise and our hyper addiction to media has created a blunted, spiritually lethal society. Like reading Christopher Moore I cringe when I read Palahniuk's work, feeling guilty for laughing, but buried amidst the bizarre scenarios and the locker room humor are social and cultural insights that are worth the effort.

This is more like Invisible Monsters than Fight Club, but as entertaining as either in its own weird Kafkaesque way and demonstrating a common misanthropic thread that may connect all of his work.

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### **Wayne Barrett says**

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can hurt like hell."

Another great satirical/horror by Mr Chuck... 'Warning, if you have read this book and suffer bleeding hemorrhoids caused by sudden outbursts of laughter you may be eligible to participate in a class action law suit'.

A childrens poem that has been quietly causing the death of infants, children, and their parents, turns out to be an ancient African culling song. A magical remedy that was originally intended to put the weak and infirm out of their misery. The protagonists of the story, Carl and Helen who inadvertently put their own loved ones to sleep... permanently... go on a mission to find all the books containing the story and destroy them before they can do any more damage. And since they have memorized the culling song themselves, their bigger battle has become, not killing everyone who annoys them along the way.

I think Lullaby has become one of my favorite Palahniuk books. Chuck is an acquired taste, but if you enjoy his work then this will be right up your kitchen.

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### **Darwin8u says**

*"After long enough, everyone in the world will be your enemy."*

? Chuck Palahniuk, *Lullaby*

Chuck Palahniuk can sometimes be casually dismissed as an oversold shock author who appeals to a certain type of hipster reader who buys his books (and now comics) with a slavish devotion usually reserved for members of an asteroid cult. Sometimes that view rings true. Occasionally, Palahniuk will deliver a book or an idea that is more of a gimp monster or lame demon of mediocrity than an explosive novel of ideas. 'Lullaby' is not one of those hobbled novels. And to be fair to Palahniuk, he has now birthed enough solid fiction to deserve much of his cult status. He isn't a Nabokov, a McCarthy or a Roth, but he has developed a solid style and voice that is both recognizable and strong.

'Lullaby' is framed around two protagonists (Carl and Helen) and their "adopted" children (Mona and Oyster). This neo-elementary family are searching for all copies of a culling song found in an anthology of children's poetry and the original book of shadows. This ends up being a road novel where each of the four characters are in search of a different world, a different magic, a different end.

There were times in this novel where Palahniuk's rants against consumerism, pollution, invasive species, noise, etc., all seem in danger of consuming the narrative, but Palahniuk's sharp nimble seems to dance through the anger with the same ease as Carl and Helen dance past the dead.

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## **Jeff says**

Oh Chuck Palahniuk, why do the kids love you? Years and years and years have passed while I have worked in a bookstore and every single year is the same, some kind of cool hipster guy or girl will come in and ask for anything by Chuck Palahniuk, bestowing praises upon his writing. Okay, I get it. The hipsters love him. Brad Pitt was in a movie based on a Palahniuk book, which was about crazy wacky anarchy, which the young hipsters love.

So, I finally sat myself down and cracked open this lovely bird of a book.

I wanted to like it. I really did. I wanted to be part of that faction... the I love Chuck Palahniuk, I smoke Camels, I roll the cuffs of my jeans and wear studded belts, but only on occasion, cause really I wear AE gear, but not AE gear bought from an actual AE store, but from a thrift shop, where it costs roughly the same amount of money if I were to buy it new, but I didn't, someone else, a stranger in fact, wore this shirt before me, thus I am cooler than you cause I bought this shirt at a thrift shop, and I have a tattoo... maybe I have two... you'll never know cause I'm mysterious, and I play the guitar, but not really, I can only play three cords, but really that's enough to make it seem like I know what I'm doing, have you ever read Vonnegut? I didn't like this book. I didn't hate it. I just didn't like it. A poem (lullaby) that has the ability to kill people when read aloud? I thought those were called Mattie Stepanek poems. ZING!

Sorry Mattie fans. I know the kid got dealt a bad card(s), but seriously? Have you read his stuff?

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## **Michele says**

Aside from not knowing how to pronounce this author's last name, reading this book was quick and easy (I read it in three days worth of bus rides to school and back). But just because it's an easy read doesn't mean

it's not thought provoking.

Palahniuk wrote *Fight Club* which was made into a movie starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton. (If you haven't seen the movie, go see it - it combines the uncertainty of a *Sixth Sense* or the confusion of a *Memento* with the light hearted social critique/commentary of *Trainspotting* or *The Big Lebowski*.) The movies I choose as metaphors to describe *Fight Club* probably say something interesting about me, but I'd rather not psychoanalyze myself right now.

Anyway, *Lullaby* is about what it sounds like, a lullaby, but it's also about death, guilt, and the corruptive force of power as it affects a reporter, a real estate agent and a couple of vegan Wiccans. It begins with an unexpected twist, and shortly follows that up with an explanation of what the lullaby is all about. At this point, after only about 20 pages in, you begin to wonder what Palahniuk was thinking when he wrote the book since he seems to have thrown all the good stuff into the beginning. But it continues to mystify, and then reveal those mystifications at odd moment throughout the novel, with the final twist being held off until the last few pages.

If you're looking for a quick, easy summer read and something a little edgier than a romance, feel good story, or chick lit, this is a quick and dirty book I would recommend reading, particularly if you liked *Fight Club* or you're looking for something out of the ordinary.

My tolerance for "ickiness" seems to be much higher than some of my book club members because the overwhelming response to this book was that there were some really despicable and graphically descriptive parts (despicable characters and a lot more description of dead/damaged bodies than some people cared for). I was the only one who found the main character, Streach, interesting. Although I couldn't condone the character's behaviour, I could certainly understand it, and I think Palahniuk did a pretty good job getting into the mind of an uptight middle-aged man with an excessively large amount of emotional baggage. So a caveat to my sense of the book would be that if you don't like to hear icky descriptions of the body, don't read this book... though if you've seen *Fight Club*, you've already seen that kind of icky when Robert gets shot, or when Norton's character pulls out his tooth.

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### **Matt says**

Chuck has never been a very good writer. He comes up with interesting ideas, uses them as a vehicle for a shitty novel, then I read it, and am disappointed every time. I have since stopped reading his books but my girlfriend says they still suck.

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### **Chloe says**

When you pick up a Chuck Palahniuk book you know that you are going to plunge ever-so-briefly into a raging torrent of absurdity, horror so whimsical that you laugh even as you cringe, and insightful looks at contemporary living. It seems a cheap shot to call his work formulaic, but once you've read through 6 or 7 of his books, the pattern emerges and you have a vague idea of what to expect.

It was *Lullaby* that finally brought this realization home to me. You have the protagonist, a man who seems like the picture of upstanding normality at first glance but who is eventually revealed to have a dark secret

hidden in his past. You have the more experienced secondary character who helps to drive the story forward by slowly revealing some answers to the mystery. Then you have the comical minor characters, the latter-day Rosencratz and Guildenstern (or the R2D2 and C3PO if you want to take it that far) if you will, who play an important roll in the advancement of events but who also provide the brilliant moments of macabre hilarity. At some point they will all go on a roadtrip and Palahniuk will ruminate on the state of human existence at the turn of the 21st Century.

And so it goes for Lullaby. Features reporter Carl Streator is assigned to report on crib death for a mid-size Portland newspaper. As he visits site after site of these tragic deaths, he notices the constant appearance of a book of children's poems all laying open to Page 27. It appears that prior to dying the infants had all been read this particular poem. Being the thorough investigative reporter that he is, Streator traces crib deaths in his area back over 20 years until he comes across Helen Hoover Boyle, a Realtor who specializes in selling (and reselling and reselling again) haunted houses to unsuspecting clients, who may know the reason why this particular poem seems to kill. It's not long before Streator, Helen, her assistant Mona (known as Mulberry in the Wiccan circles in which she travels) and Mona's boyfriend Oyster embark on a roadtrip across the country to track down every copy of this culling poem to protect the sleeping infants of the world from inadvertent death.

Like I said it's formulaic, but this just makes it easier to focus on the odd details that Palahniuk likes to toss into the mix. Oyster's long narrations about the history of invasive foreign plants and how this can be used as a means to understand the cannibalistic psyche of modern man, an EMT who learns the culling poem so that he can kill fashion models and then have sex with their dead bodies, the twisted history of antique furniture—they all add together to form a novel that, while not spectacular, definitely envelops you and reminds you why it is that Palahniuk stands out as one of the best contemporary authors of today.

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### Λ?να Θωμ?ρηη says

Δεν θυμ?μαι και πολλ? απ? το βιβλ?ο. Θυμ?μαι ?μως ?τι α) δεν ε?χα ενθουσιαστε? και β) ?κανα πολ? καιρ? να το τελει?σω ?ρα rating 2,5

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### O.M. Grey says

Brilliant. That's the word, the only word, that came to mind as I started reading Palahniuk's Lullaby. I struggled to keep reading, as I was too impressed with the prose. As a writer, reading Palahniuk made me feel like a dancing monkey in comparison.

By the time I hit the halfway mark, I struggled to keep reading for an altogether different reason. It had become too fragmented, repetitive, and just plain boring.

At the beginning, this passage stopped me. Full stop. Absolute. No going further out of awe:

"Helen, she's wearing a white suit and shoes, but not Snow White. It's more the white of downhill skiing in Banff with a private car and driver on call, fourteen pieces of matched luggage, and a suite at the Hotel Lake Louise."

By the time I had reached page 116, about halfway through, I've read about twenty passages stylistically the same.

This color. But not color like this, more like this extended metaphor.

Dull.

First time, brilliant. First few times, brilliant.

Twentieth, dull.

Okay. I might be exaggerating with the twenty mark. I didn't count, but it's repetitive enough to make it annoying. Unlike his other "choruses," like "I know this because Tyler knows this" or "these noise-aholics, these peace-aphobics" (and all the variations on that theme) or the counting to remain calm, it doesn't tie anything together. It doesn't do a thing past a look-at-how-well-I-can-write. Over and over, which defeats its own purpose. It's like those movie scenes so overdone they're obviously this-is-my-Oscar-winning-performance-scene.

Again with the ads Oyster, one of the many despicable characters in this novel, takes out to blackmail corporations. Really. Really. Old. I get it. I don't have to be beaten over the head with it.

**\*\*spoilers\*\*** -- **\*\*trigger warnings\*\***

Then, on page 177 (Ch 29), after I skipped dozens of pages of the same-ol', same-ol' repetition, where no new character development is revealed nor is the plot projected forward, I came to the part where Streater remembers orally and vaginally raping his dead wife. Of course, he only thought she was unconscious, so it was just rape, not necrophilia. "It's not rape if they're dead."

This is where I stopped reading.

Not sure which was more disturbing, the fact that Streater calls it "the best he had" since before his child was born or that he didn't even bother to check on her after he got off with her unconscious, unresponsive form.

I'm utterly disgusted by Palahniuk, and I'm not sure I'll be reading anymore. Darkness is one thing. Disturbing is one thing, and I like things very dark, but something about this is beyond revolting. Thankfully, the protagonist and everyone, really, are all horrific people, so at least the rape isn't brushed off as something acceptable. That's the only thing that might get me to try another book.

This is the first Palahniuk book in which I'd gotten this far. I'm partially into Fight Club at the moment, the second time I've tried to read it. The first I found difficult to keep going for the same reason at the beginning: blown away by the prose. That, coupled with the movie playing in my head, made it hard for me to read. I'm trying again, and I hope to get through it this time.

Two stars, only because of the brilliant prose. I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone.

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**Catten says**

Palahniuk, the Portlander (Oregon, not Maine) who wrote the cult classic *Fight Club*, has four other novels. One of them is *Lullaby*, which might or might not be just as off-the-wall as its more popular brother.

The book opens with a scene from a real estate office. Helen Hoover Boyle and her assistant Mona listen to a police scanner for deaths (and potential sales) and field calls from frightened new homeowners who have bought what Helen calls "distressed" (haunted) houses. Helen sells the same homes over and over, creating a niche market with a steady income.

Chapter two is from the perspective of an unknown character, whose identity isn't revealed until much later in the book. This narrator is hunting miracles: the Flying Virgin, who appeared in New Mexico and wrote "STOP HAVING BABYS" in the sky with a can of Bug-Off brand insect fogger; the Roadkill Jesus Christ/I-84 Messiah, who restores dead animals to their pre-accident conditions; the Judas Cow, at the Stone River Meatpacking plant in Nebraska, who refused to lead a herd of cows into the slaughterhouse, and instead took a seat and spoke at length about giving up meat, taught its audience a Hindi song, and answered questions about the nature of life and death.

The third chapter brings us to Carl Streater, a journalist trained to note details. Assigned to do a series of stories on crib death for the Lifestyles section of his newspaper, he visits the parents and homes of recently deceased babies. On his first visit, he notes, among other things, an open library book on a wicker chest in the nursery. This book, *Poems and Rhymes from Around the World*, is open to page 27. Carl diligently writes down the eight-line traditional African poem - a culling song, a lullaby, the book says - in his notes. This poem shows up at each of the homes he visits; he's found a pattern.

In his editor's office, he reads the poem aloud. The next day, the editor doesn't show up for work.

Carl has a problem with anger management and soon discovers bodies piling up around him. Mona, the realtor's assistant, is a Wiccan who recognizes Carl's power and the story just gets stranger from there. Carl, Helen, Mona, and Mona's boyfriend Oyster set out on a road trip to track down and destroy every copy of the poem.

Palahniuk's writing style is sometimes choppy and repetitive, which took a little to get used to. This story, which might be considered a magical realism murder mystery, is brilliantly conceived. The plot doesn't just twist, it writhes. For a little while, I had no idea what was going on. I became mildly frustrated. But I was already hooked, so I pressed on and finally things started coming together. The trip was worth it. And I think Palahniuk effectively taps into that irritated, misanthropic side of humanity that would never publicly admit that, "Yeah, once in awhile, I wouldn't mind having a culling song handy..."

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## **Kemper says**

To most people a lullaby is a soothing song meant to help coax a child to sleep, but in Chuck Palahniuk's hands it becomes a death spell that can kill anyone. Of course, that's not twisted enough for Chuckie P. so he had to throw in some witchcraft, necrophilia and dead babies to really make it a party.

Carl Streater is a newspaper reporter working on a feature about infant crib deaths, and he has his own tragic experience in that area. When Streater sees a book containing an African chant at several homes where the baby died, he does more digging and discovers that it's a culling song that can be used to kill just by thinking it. Since Carl has a few anger problems, this leads to a lot of deaths of people who annoy him as he tries to





## **Joel Lacivita says**

Chuck took me on an interesting ride with *Lullaby*. It's about a culling poem that will kill people when they hear it. But that's a very simple way of explaining this book, there's a lot more to it. It has several themes but it seems to be mostly about how people are never in total control of themselves. We are all possessed by something. I liked the way he talked about people that have problems with excess (ie. Drinking, eating, gambling, etc...) are actually being possessed by ghosts of people who couldn't get enough of those things while they were still alive. It does seem like that. Some people can have all sorts of control of their life but yet in certain areas, have no control.

There is great deal of humor throughout and I found myself laughing out loud several times. He has a twisted sense of humor that resonates well my twisted sense of humor.

Much like *Choke* and *Beautiful You*, this book features a character who has a scheme of making money that is dark and twisted. She sell's houses that are haunted and then gets the owners to keep quiet so she can sell it again within six months. It's great stuff. I see the pattern in his books now which *Fight Club* hammered home with such solid force. Chuck writes about a modern world where people are dysphoric and depressed and they want what they think is there's. Stepping on someone else's toes is ok if the end justifies the means. Our world of ultra-consumerism has created a society of people going me me me with no end in sight and Chuck paints this picture exceptionally well.

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## **Staring-Girl says**

After reading *Lullaby*, I'm officially a member of the Cult.

Chuck, you are to me what Oprah Winfrey is to Josh Nichols.

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## **Sean says**

The only novel by the acclaimed author of *Fight Club* that I've read, this book is more or less an essay concerning the contaminating effects caused by the constant "noise" to which Americans have grown accustomed in their lives. Be it mass media, advertisements everywhere one turns, or talking heads always telling one what to do and when to do it, this noise is everywhere, and utterly inescapable, the author argues. While I generally agree with the author's displeasure over constant sensory overload, the overt bombardment of social commentary in this book is so over-the-top and unending that it is akin to the "noise" which the author proclaims to so disdain.

The author's caterwauling is intermittently suspended to give beatification to the libertine nature of the characters' sexuality. In addition, the novel's main plot device is an epidemic of SIDS sweeping the nation, a distasteful and gratuitous illustration into the morbidly macabre mind of the author.

In summary, the author's egotistical perception of himself as a social doyen (which I've been told is a given in any Palahniuk novel) merely turns me off from his argument, causing a desire in me to stand up and

scream, "ENOUGH!" Yes, silence is one of the rarest and most valuable gifts of nature. And although people are, indeed, regularly exposed to an unavoidable amount of noise throughout their day, it is ultimately up to each person whether or not he decides to get up and turn off the TV.

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### **Paul Nash says**

Another awesome written insanity by the Master of the odd and insane!

After reading 4 Palahniuk's nearly back to back, I've noticed small little connections. I believe he is subtly connecting all his stories...and building one crazy world, one book at a time.

Spellbound!

5 stars!

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### **Mariam says**

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### **Lauren says**

Lullaby was my first book to read by Chuck Palahniuk. I was so very impressed with his writing style and his well-crafted story.

Assigned to investigate Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, a reporter uncovers an ancient culling spell. When he learns the power of the spell, and the damage it can do, he sets out with some other very interesting characters, to remove this poem/spell from every library and bookstore in the country.

In my opinion, the power of Palahniuk's style is in his use of repeated phrases. This book was about the power of words and the power of humans to change the world (good and bad). With words as a central theme in the book, Palahniuk constructs many rhymes and phrases that are mentioned often through the book:

"Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words will kill you...",

"These noisaholics, these quietophobics..."

They are very well-placed, and really add to the overall meaning of the story. The writing was very raw, enough to make me cringe at times, but I still enjoyed the overall story.

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### **Michael Breen says**

The war of who can crank their radio louder than their neighbor. Avoiding the big picture by looking at things too closely. Big Brother filling your head with marketing noise 24-7 so you he doesn't have to worry

about what your thoughts cause he created them. Control. Unlikely families. Journalism. These are the tried-and-true themes that Palahniuk has worked before in other forms in other books and they all come together nicely with Chuck's dead pan, sarcastic sense of humor. The premise of the book is a little hokey but Chuck's writing is so good you forget that magic doesn't exist and fall in love with the ridiculousness of the situation and you generally don't stop laughing long enough to think twice. It might seem to drag a little past the middle but hang with the characters till he gets all the loose ends wrapped up. It's pretty well worth it.

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