



# Design Flaws of the Human Condition

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## **Design Flaws of the Human Condition** Paul Schmidtberger

As can only happen in New York, two strangers find themselves railroaded into an anger-management class, where they soon become fast friends. Iris is there because of an eminently justifiable meltdown on a crowded flight, whereas Ken got caught defacing library books with rude (but true!) messages about his former boyfriend. The boyfriend that he caught in bed with another man.

Needless to say, Iris and Ken were cosmically destined to be friends. What follows is a strikingly original comedy as Ken enlists Iris to infiltrate his ex-boyfriend's life in the hope of discovering that he's miserable. And Iris reciprocates, dispatching Ken to work himself into the confidence of her own boyfriend, whom she suspects of cheating. But what if Ken's ex isn't crying himself to sleep? What if he's not the amoral fiend Ken wants to believe he is? And what should Iris do when her worst suspicions start to come true? Exactly how perfect do we have the right to expect our fellow human beings to be?

Anger, betrayal, loyalty, and friendship—*Design Flaws of the Human Condition* explores these universal themes with wisdom, compassion, and a wickedly irreverent sense of humor.

## **Design Flaws of the Human Condition Details**

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Author : Paul Schmidtberger

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## From Reader Review Design Flaws of the Human Condition for online ebook

### Maya says

a girl meets her new gay-guy best friend in an unfortunate anger management class and they team up to figure out what went wrong--or is going wrong--in their romantic lives.

meh. The style of humor and, well, the plot didn't appeal to me. I didn't find the characters relate-able and the writing was a little bit full-of-itself for my taste. I made it about 2/3 of the way through and even though I usually push through if I get this far in a book, if only out of sheer stubbornness, I quit. Or rather, I skimmed to the end to see how things ended up, then I quit.

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### David says

I am, apparently, irredeemably shallow. How else to explain how much I enjoyed this book? A "Will and Grace"-type story about the floundering relationships of self-involved Manhattan dwellers. Cheating boyfriends, loathsome lawyers, anger management classes\* .... The wannabe "serious reader" inside my head groaned every time I picked it up. When my copy of "The Savage Detectives" has been lying there unopened for several months now.

So be it. To be useful, our reviews here need to reflect how we actually responded to a particular book, not how we feel we ought to have responded. And the fact is: I loved this book. It was hilariously funny, compulsively readable, and managed to be quite touching. Schmidtberger pulls off a pretty neat trick - by the end of his hugely entertaining, very funny story, he makes the reader care deeply about his flawed (but entirely believable) characters. And I thought his ending was hugely satisfying.

No, it wasn't "great literature". But it was a terrific read. Which has got to count for something, right?

\*: One of the main protagonists experiences meltdown on a flight to Newark, the horrifying inevitability of which Schmidtberger nails hilariously. A great book to read on a plane, or at the beach.

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### Madeleine says

This was an utterly charming read. I loved the characters, I enjoyed the breezy tone of the book, I marveled at the accurate depiction of the unique hell that is proofreading prospectuses. I needed a book like this after the more serious things I'd been reading, what with the bleak Britishness and the apocalyptic happenings. The pacing made this a pretty quick read; the likability of the main characters and their cheating ex- and soon-to-be-ex-significant others made it an enjoyable one.

So why the three stars? This is quite clearly a first novel. It's still leaps and bounds better than a lot of other first novels I've read but the narrative got a little wobbly and wandering at times, the dialogue meandered into amusing but borderline-tedious tangents just a little too much in places (the characters seemed a bit too smitten with their own clever one-liners at points) and I'm allergic to writing that relies too heavily on the

exclamation point. This book would have been almost amazing if it'd gone through just one more round of editing.

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### **Karen says**

#### **Great characters**

I loved the madcap adventures that all the characters got into and despite the craziness, I loved that all the characters were totally relatable. I had them all fleshed out in my mind's eye with voices and everything. I'm sorry to part with them now that this book is finished. I highly recommend this book to people who like reading for fun, you know, as opposed to snooty readers who read economics books or math or other drudgery.

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### **Cheryl Covier says**

#### **Unexpected though realistic humor.**

From the beginning I was unsure of this book as a humorous one until you read on and get involved in the lives of the characters. I like the way the book has each of the characters eventually come to terms with their own realizations just as in real life. The intertwining of the characters at the end of the story was fascinating.

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### **Tina says**

This fun, quirky, funny read was everything I hoped it would be. Witty and smart, it's populated by clever, likeable characters in believable plots and subplots. I look forward to more from this most promising author. Highly recommended.

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### **Karl Dennhardt says**

Maybe somebody that is more easily amused might actually find this book humorous. I sure didn't. This book so made me think Jerry Seinfeld and George Kostanza. Like the show, this book was basically about nothing. New Yorkers obsessing, going on and on and on.

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### **Dani Meehan says**

Quick funny read. I want to be friends with these people.

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## **ub says**

Tedious

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## **Caitlin says**

I got the book yesterday and I just tore through it in a couple of hours- I don't know about you, but there is nothing better than picking up a good book and just completely losing yourself in it. I would absolutely recommend this book to everyone- Paul Schmidtberger weaves a tale that makes you want to live between the pages. It was a quirky read that followed Iris and Ken, two friends, as they struggle with "design flaws" of their peers- especially Iris' boyfriend Jeremy and Ken's ex-boyfriend Brett. Call me a hipster, but this book has quotes that made my "book quote list" (What? Don't tell me you don't have one...). The writing is somewhat uneven at times, if you want to nit-pick it, but this book certainly deserves more attention than it has- it has some romance without it being gag-worthy, comedy without being childish, and sadness without destroying your day.

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## **LoLo says**

Normally I would give this a (high) 4, but I think my recent string of bad reads really ramped up my enjoyment and appreciation of this one.

It's just so delightfully sharp. Subtly hilarious. And teeters on the line between verbosity and that annoying, headache-y place after "verbosity" but that's the kind of writing I like.

The story is great and well plotted, the themes are smart and heartwarming, and the characters really come to life in their relationships to each other. This is one I would buy and read again and again as treat.

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## **David Hallman says**

It's not that I would say, "Gee, I wish I'd written that book."

It's more that I would say, "Gee, I wish I could write my books like that."

Paul Schmidtberger's "Design Flaws of the Human Condition" is written with an enviable wit, capacity for surprise, and astute observation of human foibles. The characters are finely drawn in part through detailed descriptions of their idiosyncratic behaviour and in part through Schmidtberger's relating of their internal monologues.

But whereas too many of us who call ourselves 'writers' relate internal thoughts of our characters which begin, more or less, with them saying "this is how I feel" and then continue with "this is why I feel what I just told you I feel," Schmidtberger does not. Instead, the internal monologues of his characters give us insight into who they are by relating very cleverly their musing about the world around them and the people who make up that world.

That's a crucial difference. Editors' sometimes lecture us 'writers' with the admonition "show me, don't tell me." That is to say, let the reader discover what the characters feel through what they do and what they think.

Schmidtberger does that with a fulsome economy (that's not as much of a paradox as it may seem) and with a wit that sometimes had me laughing out loud and sometimes grimacing with the pathos.

"Design Flaws of the Human Condition" was an absolute delight to read.

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Information on "Design Flaws of the Human Condition" available at: <http://amzn.to/RiphQR>

For information on my memoir "August Farewell" and my novel "Searching for Gilead", see my website at <http://DavidGHallman.com>

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## **Ilona says**

Quick, quirky, fun. I read most of this book while a passenger on an otherwise boring car trip. I'm not sure if I amused or annoyed the driver by bursting into loud laughter at regular intervals, but I wasn't about to stop.

The book was a nice mix of silliness and serious thought. Not particularly deep serious thought, perhaps, but real. The questions raised about relationships, learning through them, growing out of them, seeking them despite past failures and probable future failures... those are all real.

But mostly what I enjoyed was the full-speed-ahead plot, and the light bitchy humour. A fun read, and I will be looking for more books by this author.

(view spoiler)

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## **Carl R. says**

Paul Schmidtberger's first novel, *Design Flaws of the Human Condition*, came to my attention via my friend and neighbor who is also the author's aunt. Thanks, Janice, for the heads up.

*Design Flaws* is constructed in the manner of an 18th-19th century farce complete with our omniscient author manipulating the characters into improbable coincidences in full view of us dear readers. We get witty, Fielding-like chapter headings ("In which Iris Unwisely Disregards the Captain's Advice to Sit Back, Relax, and Enjoy the Flight," for example), that not only comment on the action but help maintain the tongue-in-cheek tone that permeates even the most serious moments in the novel. The characters are mid-to-upper-mid Manhattan professionals--lawyers, academics, marketeers--who are thrown together during mutual crises in their romantic and/or economic lives.

And the place where the omnipotent Schmitberger throws them together is an anger management class. (So detailed is the knowledge of the class, one can't help but speculate how dear author did his research.)

The pace is quick throughout, the writing crisp, humorous and appropriate to the whole, even when

introducing backstory, which is the downfall so many otherwise fine books: “What Iris and Jeremy hadn’t known as they arrived at Macy’s was that minutes earlier, yet another New Yorker had chosen the Hummel figurine display on the sixth floor as the perfect spot for his long-overdue nervous breakdown.” It seems that we’re always surfing a frothy moment and exuberantly anticipating the next turn of the wave. It’s a comedy of manners among sophisticated folks whom we like and cheer for.

Now, perhaps to carry my surfing analogy too far, we do get dumped off our boards from time to time. There are anachronisms of both technology and attitude. We see mention of, for example, a walkman as a contemporary device when we all know it is now an extinct species, particularly among NYC sophisticates. Of course, I can’t blame Schmidtberger for that one. Considering how long it takes from the time authors sit down at that first blank page (or screen) till they finally see the book in print can be technological sea changes later. Some copywriter should have caught the problem. Ditto with a couple of instances of points of view on homosexuality. At some fairly recent point in time (even in Manhattan) it might have been appropriate to write “the rumors were true--Professor Connelly was gay. Stage direction: gasp.” or to have a classmate of Connelly’s in the anger management group be a bit disturbed by his homosexuality. By the publishing date of 2007, however, you might find responses like that in Kansas, but not up and down the East Coast. Furthermore, throughout the rest of the book, gay pairings are treated as a normal fact of life, so the shock is as inappropriate to the novel’s world as it is to the culture it depicts. As a final arrow in the heart of our imaginary incompetent copyreader, I submit this “sentence.” ... Iris’s the overall impression Iris was left with was ... “--clearly a revision whose original version didn’t quite get deleted. The poor authors can’t do every damn thing themselves.

In addition to the deft execution of form and language, there is significant substance of theme and thought throughout, which fleshes out the whole work nicely, keeps it from cocktail party shallowness. Plenty of discussion about reality and illusion. Lots of dreams--a tricky device which Schmidtberger integrates well into the book’s emotional and action life. There’s a fascinating conceit of an illusory bird in a cage which is too long and tricky to recount here, but which operates as a nice commentary on the characters’ situations. Thus does the novel live up to its title, demonstrating how difficult it is to live orderly and rational lives when even the best of us is so riddled with contradictions and imperfections.

So, we have in *Design Flaws* extremely satisfying and meaningful read--up until the last pages. It seems to me that after the anger management class reunion *Design Flaw* loses dramatic tension, and I missed the energy of what had gone before. Instead of a satisfying conclusion, or even an open-ended “ending,” we get an overlong denouement that feels like a tagged on short story involving the same characters (or most of them. One or two major ones, like Jeremy, disappear entirely) but which is artistically (even if factually) unrelated to the rest of the book. That’s probably just me, though. You might love the neat little revenge plots that I found irrelevant.

Whether you agree with my take or not, I can pretty much guarantee that the fun, frolic, wit, and downright humanness of these real and sympathetic characters will carry you through the book and stay with you for days after you finish.

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## **Ann Rufo says**

A thoroughly enjoyable quick read with some great one-liners, funny subplots, and poignant insights along the way. I picked it up for the humor, but what kept me reading and thinking about it was the really honest, simple way he describes the situation of the main characters, namely being cheated on in their relationship, a fact made uniquely devastating by the realization that the “cheaters” were not the stereotypically cold, evil, heartless excuses of human wreckage we wanted them to be, but rather people dealing with love - what it means and how we both fall in and out of it. Watching the main characters reach the same conclusion and start asking themselves the same questions, all while hysterically building friendships over stalking and

forced anger management classes makes this well worth the read. The consistent jabs against lawyers and the legal system helped as well - which, as a lawyer, I'm allowed to say.

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