



Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde: A True Story

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The ultimate fish-out-of-water tale . . .

A child who never quite fit in, Rebecca Dana worshipped at the altar of Truman Capote and Nora Ephron, dreaming of one day ditching Pittsburgh and moving to New York, her Jerusalem. After graduating from college, she made her way to the city to begin her destiny. For a time, life turned out exactly as she'd planned: glamorous parties; beautiful people; the perfect job, apartment, and man. But when it all came crashing down, she found herself catapulted into another world. She moves into Brooklyn's enormous Lubavitch community, and lives with Cosmo, a thirty-year-old Russian rabbi who practices jujitsu on the side.

While Cosmo, disenchanted with Orthodoxy, flirts with leaving the community, Rebecca faces the fact that her religion—the books, magazines, TV shows, and movies that made New York seem like salvation—has also failed her. As she shuttles between the world of religious extremism and the world of secular excess, Rebecca goes on a search for meaning.

Trenchantly observant, entertaining as hell, a mix of Shalom Auslander and The Odd Couple, Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde is a thought-provoking coming-of-age story for the twenty-first century.

Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde: A True Story Details

Date : Published January 24th 2013 by Amy Einhorn Bks: Putnam

ISBN : 9780399158773

Author : Rebecca Dana

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography, Biography Memoir, Literature, Jewish

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From Reader Review Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde: A True Story for online ebook

Nicole Rhaven says

I won this book from First Reads in trade for my honest review.

How do you rate someone's life story?

How they perceive it in a book, I suppose.

I thought that I was going to enjoy this one. I thought it was going to be cleverly witty, but it wasn't; the author tried too hard by going into way too much detail to reach her point, and by the time she reach said point you kinda lost interest in what she was getting at.

I thought that it would get into the relationship of what the title implied as well.

So, I am just left feeling like I missed out on something.

Sarah Levine says

I had high hopes for this book, and was intrigued by both the title, and the jacket description. The book however just dragged on. I kept waiting for the point of the story, yet realized in the last 50 pages that it was just going nowhere.

Florence says

Rebecca Dana is a native of Pittsburgh who always wanted to live in Manhattan. After a break up with her long time boyfriend, she ended up living in a rodent infested walk up in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. Her roommate is a young rabbi with many religious friends in the neighborhood. It may have been a setback in her life, but I was tickled to hear about how the Lubavitchers , a sect of ultra conservative Jews, live their everyday lives. Young women with wigs and hordes of young children cooking elaborate meals for the sabbath. It makes a nice contrast to Dana's hipster life, attending fashion week events in Manhattan. Above all, she is an engaging writer who has a knack for turning ordinary events into an absorbing dialogue.

Rachelfm says

The writing was not bad. It's just that I'd read the prologue and the title (hence my borrowing it from the SPL), and the subsequent 250ish pages failed to really expand upon or improve on it.

While I appreciated that the author could make fun of the origins of her rather vapid worldview/values at times, I couldn't help but thinking that the whole topic was just not very daring subject matter. I mean, think

about any other situation in which someone's ticket to life is punched (the author has a degree from Yale and seems to be super-connected to the New York and California glitterati...I mean, if you are an Ivy League grad slumming through hookups from your Emmy-winning friends and and drinking with Candace Bushnell, well, you've made it)and they get to sell a really lucrative book telling about a time when it was hard and they had a weird roommate, sumitting Everest it ain't.

I think that my dissatisfaction is more of a meta-critique on our modern life when we are so connected, dialed and scheduled that the idea that a rather pedestrian romantic breakup can drive you to living with a roommate of a different religious and cultural background as a sort of crucible in which to forge your soul and serve as the adventure of a lifetime is a bit silly. I mean, really. Is this what passes for travail and adventure and big gambling in 2013?

Let's swashbuckle, people.

Lisa says

In *JUJITSU RABBI AND THE GODLESS BLOND*, Rebecca Dana chronicles her love of all things New York - the fashion, the culture, the trend setters and the city itself. After coming out of a devastating breakup and moving into an apartment with a Russian rabbi, she examines her life - relationships, work, worshipping at the altar of New York - and tries to figure out if her chosen religion, following the guru Carrie Bradshaw, is what she needs to be doing with her life.

Self-indulgent? A little. She seemed compelled to name drop...celebrities she'd interviewed or famous people she'd seen at parties, and this got a little tiresome.

I mostly enjoyed her interactions with her rabbi roommate, Cosmo. He helped her reexamine her Jewish roots and delve more deeply into the Jewish faith. Dana wondered about the superficiality of her life and life choices. Is it enough to really love following fashion trends?

After her year of sharing an apartment with Cosmo, she came around to the New York life she'd chosen and was able to see it with new eyes and embrace it with new-found acceptance. And maybe a bit more appreciation for her Jewish roots as well.

This review is also found on my blog...
www.notthenewyorktimesbookreview.blog...

Tracey says

I enjoyed this book quite a bit, although it suffers from a little superficiality. It's a self-discovery story that doesn't take itself too seriously. I would have liked more of the jujitsu rabbi himself, and some greater exploration of what she learned about herself from hanging out with her Hasidic neighbors, but overall I recommend this title as a light and easy read.

Florine says

I was expecting something funnier, with a more detailed relationship between the rabbi & the blonde. It is really more about the author's journey after a breakup, thinking about life, future, how to cope & what to do with her life. I wanted more of the relationship with Cosmo, and felt short-changed a little.

christa says

Whenever I read a memoir by a writer who is unknown to me (and not a freshly rehabilitated drug addict -- strangers I will blindly read), it always inspires a variation of the same fan fiction about how this book came to be.

In the case of Rebecca Dana's "Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde" it goes like this:

Scene: Modern-day dinner party.

Characters: Would-be memoirist standing at a table covered in top shelf booze surrounded by a gaggle of tipsy friends and acquaintances on tippier shoes.

Writer: So there I was in my ex-apartment clearing out my stuff before the asshole returned when SHE (points dramatically with thumb to best bud) shows me a hair clip that was on the nightstand that doesn't belong to me, obvi (points with pointer finger to tightly cropped bleached-blonde hair).

Acquaintance: Oh no he didn't.

Writer: (Nodding slowly) So I take the stuffed Eeyore he got me when I was in the hospital and spike it like a football. Then I stab it over and over again with the heel of my Louboutins. All the while it's like croaking the song "Blue Christmas."

(Everyone erupts with laughter)

Acquaintance: That. Is. Hilar.

Best Bud: True story. I was there. (Performs a dying robot dance move to the song "Blue Christmas")

(More laughter)

Second best bud: Only Rebecca. I keep telling her she's HAS to write a book. She's got so many stories!

Writer: (Smiles and nods) I really should. No one would believe it wasn't fiction.

Best Bud: Oh! Oh! Tell them about the time you moved to Crown Heights and lived with the rabbi!

End Scene.

Dana's story covers a year in her life when she went from the blissfully unaware half of doomed, albeit perfect-seeming couple, into hiding in the Brooklyn neighborhood with a large population of Hasidic Jews -- including, kind of, her roommate Cosmo, a Jewish scholar who is quickly losing his religion.

While in Crown Heights, the pop culture/fashion writer for Daily Beast by day becomes an embedded journalist by night, examining the religion she's been a bit half-assed about in the past. Along the way are little mini-episodes about life at her Skittles-colored office, drugs with strangers at the Boom Boom Room, fashion week and running with Tina Brown's crew (and sharing a table with Candace Bushnell).

This is a strange, strange little book. It starts out like well-written chick lit: gushy love that ends as just another public breakup on a Manhattan street. When she moves to Crown Heights it turns to first-person journalism as she describes the difference between her work and social life and Shabbat dinners with orthodox neighbors. As it goes on, it becomes a list of sexy events attended and who was there and who Tweeted what about a 13-year-old fashionista. There are trips to Los Angeles and New Orleans. It's all billed as "Let me tell you about the whacky roommate I had" -- and he does truly have a unique history and some quality one liners -- but Cosmo doesn't have nearly the screen time the title suggests.

I wanted more smart, well-written Dana, earning easy access into people's lives and writing about an unfamiliar culture and making a joke by quoting Philip Larkin. She's a great magazine-style reporter with an eye for detail and context. But so much of this is Carrie Bradshaw Dana: Partying with models and referring to Tina Brown as Tina. The latter feels like a shiny lure for people who might be put off if forced to read about self-discovery among the deeply religious instead of self-discovery from inside a rack of this season's Marc Jacobs. And the name dropping comes across as a sort of on-going plea for street cred when her writing really speaks for itself.

I'm dissing this harder than I mean to. "Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde" is a good book, it just feels a little disjointed. I kept wondering why I was reading about her life and wishing I was reading something she had written about someone else's life.

Also: I wonder when women will stop considering Carrie Bradshaw a spirit animal.

Rebecca says

While some of the episodes are funny, as a whole I found the book disjointed and choppy.

Mom2nine says

Gratuitous use of "rabbi" to sell a rambling slice of the author's life. Dana repeatedly calls being a mother shallow and confining; this from a woman who paid someone to asphyxiate her for a near-death experience toward spiritual awakening. It is hard to believe that Dana has made her living writing. Very little humor and a bit of insight into the Hasidic Jewish life by a shallow, self-centered narrator.

Amy says

It's difficult to feel a sympathetic connection to an author who says things like "In a world full of people like me...how do you get anyone to care about anything" and "Do as much good in the world as you can, and make some money doing it" (p. 232). "Most of the sane world will think this is insipid" (p. 197). Pretty much sums it up. This isn't a horrible book, I just can't relate to it and it's not for me. If you love fashion and think Sex & the City is the best show ever made, this book may be for you.

This review is based on a free copy obtained from the publisher.

Christine says

When this book first landed in my hands, I thought, "Great, yet another memoir by a Carrie Bradshaw-wannabe whose Sex in the City lifestyle falls apart after a breakup." There were parts of the book that were just tiresome -- the name-dropping ("Tina Brown! Tina Brown!"), and the accounts of clubs and bars and parties that made up her vapid Manhattan existence.

But what was so refreshing about the memoir and made me keep reading is that Rebecca Dana is so damn unapologetic about what she wanted out of life. She wanted it, she made it happen, and I admire her for that. And despite Cosmo, the jujitsu rabbi, having less airtime than the book's title led me to believe, she does a great job introducing the ultra-Orthodox Jewish side of NYC to someone who was unaware of that world. The book is NOT predictable in the sense that once she became more immersed in the Lubavitcher world, I had no idea what was going to happen to her. Was she going to become more Jewish? Run screaming back to Manhattan? Hook up with Cosmo? Who knew, and though the ending wasn't very satisfying, I couldn't stop reading to find out.

wade says

Bare in mind that the reviewer is a 60 year plus male who is reading about many things that are not high on his list of interests like New York City, fashion week and Lubavitch Judaism and I still went with four stars. So that should indicate the book is very well written and captured my audience even though its subject was far outside the middle America where I live. Ms. Dana writes realistically and humorously about the ups and downs in her life in the big city. She was a girl in Pittsburgh that always wanted the Sex in the City life. She found some of that but what makes the book so good is reading about things that she didn't expect.

Jaclyn Day says

This memoir of an occasionally hard-partying, fashion-obsessed Manhattan woman who relocates to the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn after a break-up to become the platonic roommate of a jujitsu-studying Hasidic Russian rabbi named Cosmo seems like a good premise, right? What's not to like?

For some reason, I could not get through this book. I have a new policy about putting books aside if I'm not feeling them—something I didn't do for a very, very long time. Despite that policy, I stuck this one out. I

kept telling myself that I must be missing something. It was named an Amazon best book of the month in January, it's been reviewed by several dozen major publications, I've seen it on several "must read" lists and yet...I really didn't care for it.

As a story of self-discovery and a narrative about the intersection of the secular and the very religious in modern society, it is mildly successful. All the parts that make for a good book are there. Dana is a good, technical writer. She was living an interesting life. Where did this book go wrong? Why did every page feel interminable and why did I wake up each morning with no recollection of anything I read the night before? It's an utterly forgettable book.

It's clear that Dana was constructing a hybrid of many recently popular types of books. There is an Eat, Pray, Love-ish sense of narcissism, a Wild bit of introspection, and of course, a healthy dose of Sex and the City-ish stereotypes just to round everything out. It's ironic that without Cosmo's presence she'd have little to no material at all (let alone a catchy title), but he doesn't appear often in the book. When he does, he feels one-dimensional. His jujitsu-studying is mentioned off-hand. He's as flat as a pancake, but then again, so is Dana. I didn't care much about any of them and I read the last page not caring that it was ending. It's not a bad book. It's not a great book. It's not even a good book or an okay book or a so-so book. I'm totally indifferent and I think that's probably worse than hating it.

Kels Fidler says

I received this book from Goodreads as an advance readers copy and finished it last night. I'm still kind of ambivalent about it. Jujitsu Rabbi and the Godless Blonde: A True Story tells the story of two intertwined lives: that of the author, Rebecca, who has lost her faith in the one thing she believes in, New York and all its promises, and Cosmo, a thirty year old rabbi who has lost his religion, and his sense of self. The book begins with the author explaining her hope to leave Pennsylvania and start a new life in New York City, becoming a sophisticated young woman who has everything she's ever wanted. However, when her whole life starts to fall apart, she moves in with Cosmo, and slowly the two begin to become friends, Rebecca eventually starting to delve into her Jewish heritage, even as the hilarious, mysterious Cosmo begins to move away from it.

What I liked:

- Cosmo, and his craziness (I can't imagine living with him!)
- Rebecca at spots, and how she goes on a search for the meaning of life, even looking deeper into her Jewish identity to do so
- The way I learned about Jewish culture from them both
- Rebecca's motley assortment of friends throughout her journey
- Cosmo saying that being Jewish isn't all that defines him anymore
- Rebecca's descriptions of all the places she went
- The ending and how Rebecca felt satisfied with doing something good and something meaningful, even if that isn't all she does

What I didn't like:

- The way Rebecca seemed to be in despair throughout half the book and it seemed to me she didn't do a thing about it
- Vera
- Chad

-The description of violence in Brooklyn

-Rebecca's irrational thought that she was going to be raped or assaulted on the way home from work

Overall, I enjoyed the book--it was a funny, enlightening journey into finding faith and being loved.
