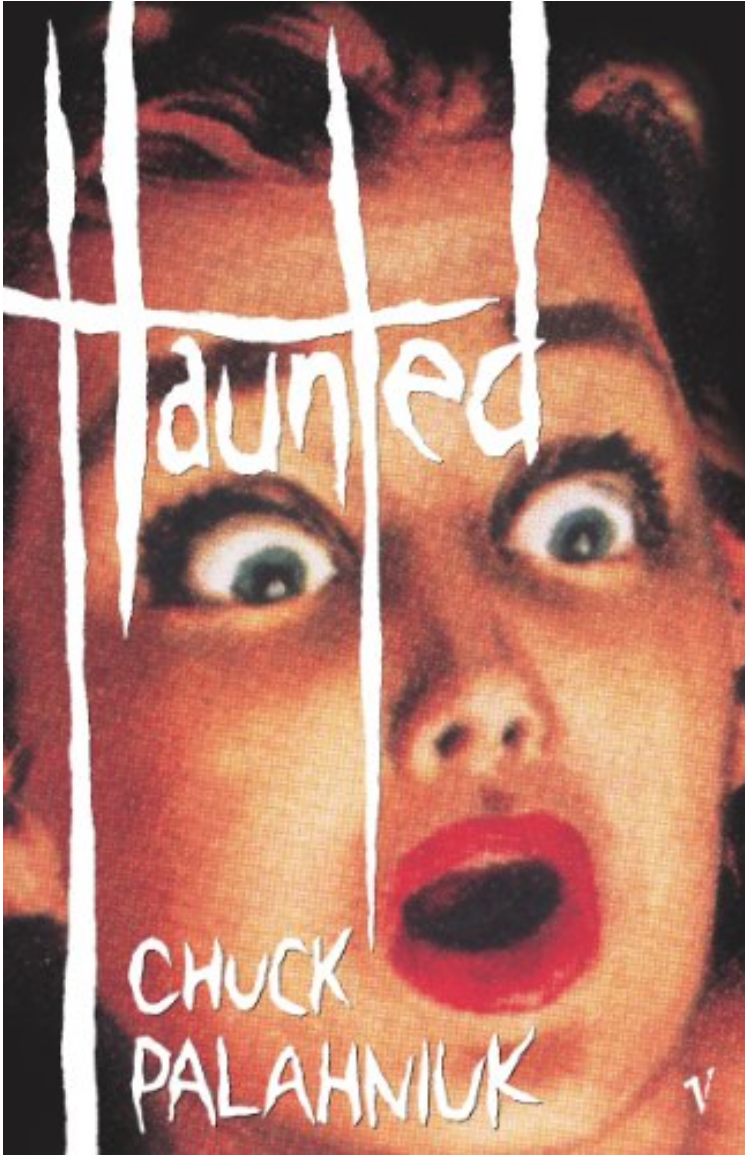


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Haunted



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurHaunted is a novel made up of stories: twenty-three of the most horrifying, hilarious, mind-blowing, stomach-churning tales you'll ever encounter. They are told by the people who have all answered an ad headlined 'Artists Retreat: Abandon your life for three months'. They are led to believe that here they will leave behind all the distractions of 'real life' that are keeping them from creating the masterpiece that is in them. But 'here' turns out to be a cavernous and ornate old theatre where they are utterly isolated from the outside world - and where heat and power and, most importantly, food are in increasingly short supply. And the more desperate the circumstances become, the more desperate the stories they tell - and the more devious their machinations to make themselves the hero of the inevitable

play/movie/non-fiction blockbuster that will certainly be made from their plight. Extrait Guinea Pigs This was supposed to be a writers' retreat. It was supposed to be safe. An isolated writers' colony, where we could work, run by an old, old, dying man named Whittier, until it wasn't. And we were supposed to write poetry.

Pretty poetry. This crowd of us, his gifted students, locked away from the ordinary world for three months. And we called each other the "Matchmaker." And the "Missing Link." Or "Mother Nature." Silly labels. Free-association names. The same way--when you were little--you invented names for the plants and animals in your world. You called peonies--sticky with nectar and crawling with ants--the "ant flower." You called collies: Lassie Dogs. But even now, the same way you still call someone "that man with one leg." Or, "you know, the black girl . . ." We called each other: The "Earl of Slander." Or "Sister Vigilante." The names we earned, based on our stories. The names we gave each other, based on our life instead of our family: "Lady Baglady." "Agent Tattletale." Names based on our sins instead of our jobs: "Saint Gut-Free." And the "Duke of Vandals." Based on our faults and crimes. The opposite of superhero names. Silly names for real people. As if you cut open a rag doll and found inside: Real intestines, real lungs, a beating heart, blood. A lot of hot, sticky blood. And we were supposed to write short stories. Funny short stories. Too many of us, locked away from the world for one wholespring, summer, winter, autumn--one whole season of that year. It doesn't matter who we were as people, not to old Mr. Whittier. But he didn't say this at first. To Mr. Whittier, we were lab animals. An experiment. But we didn't know. No, this was only a writers' retreat until it was too late for us to be anything, except his victims.

1. When the bus pulls to the corner where Comrade Snarky had agreed to wait, she stands there in an army-surplus flak jacket--dark olive-green--and baggy camouflage pants, the cuffs rolled up to show infantry boots. A suitcase on either side of her. With a black beret pulled down tight on her head, she could be anyone. "The rule was . . .," Saint Gut-Free says into the microphone that hangs above his steering wheel. And Comrade Snarky says, "Fine." She leans down to unbuckle a luggage tag off one suitcase. Comrade Snarky tucks the luggage tag in her olive-green pocket, then lifts the second suitcase and steps up into the bus. With one suitcase still on the curb, abandoned, orphaned, alone, Comrade Snarky sits down and says, "Okay." She says, "Drive." We were all leaving notes, that morning. Before dawn. Sneaking out on tiptoe with our suitcase down dark stairs, then along dark streets with only garbage trucks for company. We never did see the sun come up. Sitting next to Comrade Snarky, the Earl of Slander was writing something in a pocket notepad, his eyes flicking between her and his pen. And, leaning over sideways to look, Comrade Snarky says, "My eyes are green, not brown, and my hair is naturally this color auburn." She watches as he writes green, then says, "And I have a little red rose tattooed on my butt cheek." Her eyes settle on the silver tape recorder peeking out of his shirt pocket, the little-mesh microphone of it, and she says, "Don't write dyed hair. Women either lift or tint the color of their hair." Near them sits Mr. Whittier, where his spotted, trembling hands can grip the folded chrome frame of his wheelchair. Beside him sits Mrs. Clark, her breasts so big they almost rest in her lap. Eyeing them, Comrade Snarky leans into the gray flannel sleeve of the Earl of Slander. She says, "Purely ornamental, I assume. And of no nutritive value . . ." That was the day we missed our last sunrise. At the next dark street corner, where Sister Vigilante stands waiting, she holds up her thick black wristwatch, saying, "We agreed on four-thirty-five." She taps the watch face with her other hand, saying, "It is now four-thirty-nine . . ."

"Sister Vigilante, she brought a fake-leather case with a strap handle, a flap that closed with a snap to protect the Bible inside. A purse handmade to lug around the Word of God. All over the city, we waited for the bus. At street corners or bus-stop benches, until Saint Gut-Free drove up. Mr. Whittier sitting near the front with Mrs. Clark. The Earl of Slander. Comrade Snarky and Sister Vigilante. Saint Gut-Free pulls the lever to fold open the door, and standing on the curb is little Miss Sneazy. The sleeves of her sweater lumpy with dirty tissues stuffed inside. She lifts her suitcase and it rattles loud as popcorn in a microwave oven. With every step up the stairs into the bus, the suitcase rattles loud as far-off machine-gun fire, and Miss Sneazy looks at us and says, "My pills." She gives the suitcase a loud shake and says, "A whole three months' supply . . ." That's why the rule about only so much luggage. So we would all fit. The only rule was one bag per person, but Mr. Whittier didn't say how big or what kind. When Lady Baglady climbed on board, she wore a diamond ring the size of a popcorn kernel, her hand holding a leash, the leash dragging a leather suitcase on little wheels. Waving her fingers to make her ring sparkle, Lady Baglady says, "It's my late husband, cremated and made into a three-carat diamond . . ." At that, Comrade Snarky leans over the notepad where the Earl of Slander is writing, and she says, "Facelift is one word." A few blocks later, after a couple traffic lights and around some corners waits Chef Assassin, carrying a molded aluminum suitcase with, inside, all his white elastic underpants and T-shirts and socks folded down to squares tight as origami. Plus a

matched set of chef's knives. Under that, his aluminum suitcase is solid-packed with banded stacks of money, all of it hundred-dollar bills. All of it so heavy he used both hands to lift it into the bus. Down another street, under a bridge and around the far side of a park, the bus pulled to the curb where no one seemed to wait. There the man we called the "Missing Link" stepped out of the bushes near the curb. Balled in his arms, he carried a black garbage bag, torn and leaking plaid flannel shirts. Looking at the Missing Link, but talking sideways to the Earl of Slander, Comrade Snarky said, "His beard looks like something Hemingway might've shot . . ." "The dreaming world, they'd think we were crazy. Those people still in bed, they'd be asleep another hour, then washing their faces, under their arms, and between their legs, before going to the same work they did every day. Living that same life, every day. Those people would cry to find us gone, but they would cry, too, if we were boarding a ship to start a new life across some ocean. Emigrating. Pioneers. This morning, we were astronauts. Explorers. Awake while they slept. These people would cry, but then they would go back to waiting tables, painting houses, programming computers. At our next stop, Saint Gut-Free swung open the doors, and a cat ran up the steps and down the aisle between the seats of the bus. Behind the cat came Director Denial, saying, "His name is Cora." The cat's name was Cora Reynolds. "I didn't name him," said Director Denial, the tweed blazer and skirt she wore frosted with cat hair. One lapel swollen out from her chest. "A shoulder holster," says Comrade Snarky, leaning close to tell the tape recorder in the Earl of Slander's shirt pocket. All of this--whispering in the dark, leaving notes, keeping secret--it was our adventure. If you were planning to be stranded on a desert island for three months, what would you bring along? Let's say all your food and water would be provided, or so you think. Let's say you can only bring along one suitcase because there will be a lot of you, and the bus taking you all to the desert island is only so big. What would you pack in your suitcase? Saint Gut-Free brought boxes of pork-rind snacks and dried cheese puffs, his fingers and chin orange with the salt dust. One bony hand gripping the steering wheel, he tilted each box to pour the snacks into his thin face. Sister Vigilante brought a shopping bag of clothes with a satchel bag set in the top. Leaning over her own huge breasts, holding them like a child in her arms, Mrs. Clark asked, did Sister Vigilante bring along a human head? And Sister Vigilante opened the satchel far enough to show the three holes of a black bowling ball, saying, "My hobby . . ." Comrade Snarky looks from the Earl of Slander scribbling into his notepad, then looks at Sister Vigilante's braided-tight black hair, not one strand pulling loose from its pins. "That," Comrade Snarky says, "is tinted hair." At our next stop, Agent Tattletale stood with a video camera held to one eye, filming the bus as it pulled to the curb. He brought a stack of business cards he passed out to prove he was a private detective. With his video camera held as a mask covering half his face, he filmed us, walking down the aisle to an empty seat at the back, blinding everyone with his spotlight. A city block later, the Matchmaker climbed on board, tracking horse shit on his cowboy boots. A straw cowboy hat in his hands and a duffel bag hung over one shoulder, he sat and peeled back his window and spit brown tobacco juice down the brushed-steel side of the bus. This is what we brought along for three months outsi... From Publishers Weekly One of Palahniuk's more sweeping and macabre offerings, this is a collection of 23 short stories and poems generated at a fictional writer's retreat turned grotesque survival camp. The pieces range from the stomach-turning to the satirical or the absurd. The seven readers tackling the decidedly offbeat Palahniuk are, for the most part, refreshingly successful. Cashman is a standout, narrating the action at the retreat. His voice shuttles nimbly between the male and female writers, while maintaining the integrity of his own unnamed character. Morey's narration is disappointing on "Guts," the novel's most notorious and gruesome tale, which has reportedly caused some listeners to faint. Morey sounds too mature and polished for this series of wicked adolescent masturbatory nightmares. In general, the multivoiced narration is practiced and professional, with the trio of actresses turning in particularly strong performances. The other side of all that spit and polish is that Palahniuk's humor is occasionally stifled. Some listeners may wonder whether the author's prose is so singular that only he might be capable of delivering it. But overall, an engaging, albeit lengthy, listen. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.