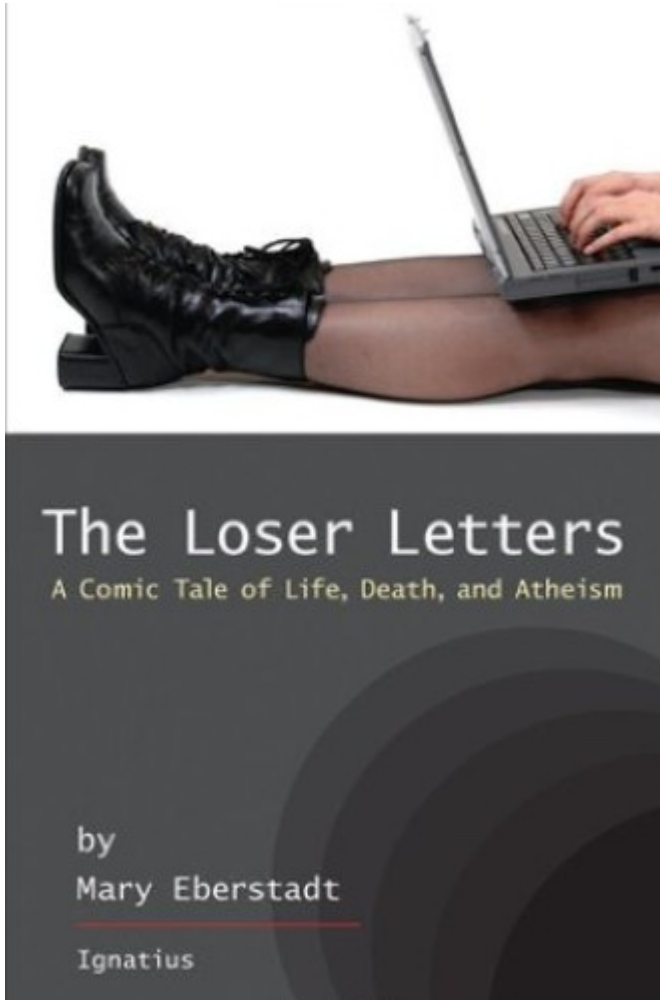


Not quite Screwtape

By [David Heim](#)

December 29, 2010

In Review



The Loser Letters

by Mary Eberstadt

Ignatius

In mock

letters of advice from a convert to godlessness, Eberstadt tells the "major-league atheist guys" (Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens *et al.*) how they need to firm up their arguments. This is a breezy take on *Screwtape Letters*, voiced by a beleaguered 20-something atheist who can't help noticing that the believers ("Dulls," in atheist-speak) have some pretty good evidence on their side.

Just look at

the record when it comes to great art, good deeds and defending human dignity, for example. Better to avoid those topics, she counsels:

The Dulls not only do this charitable stuff because their backward books tell them to; they also think that helping the weak is a good thing to do just in and of itself. As long as they persist in believing such an unnatural thing, it will be hard for us Atheists to bring them in by promising that the unbelievers do better at this game. They're stupid, yes--but not that stupid.

Eberstadt's setup makes it a bit too easy for her to score ideological points. Indeed, her fondness for her counterarguments to the atheists offers a sharp contrast to the appealing humility of C. S. Lewis's approach in *Screwtape*, with its piercing perception of how the devil's arguments get inside all of us. But it's a lively effort, and she is especially effective in suggesting how the New Atheism might sound to youth who grew up in a culture of atheism.