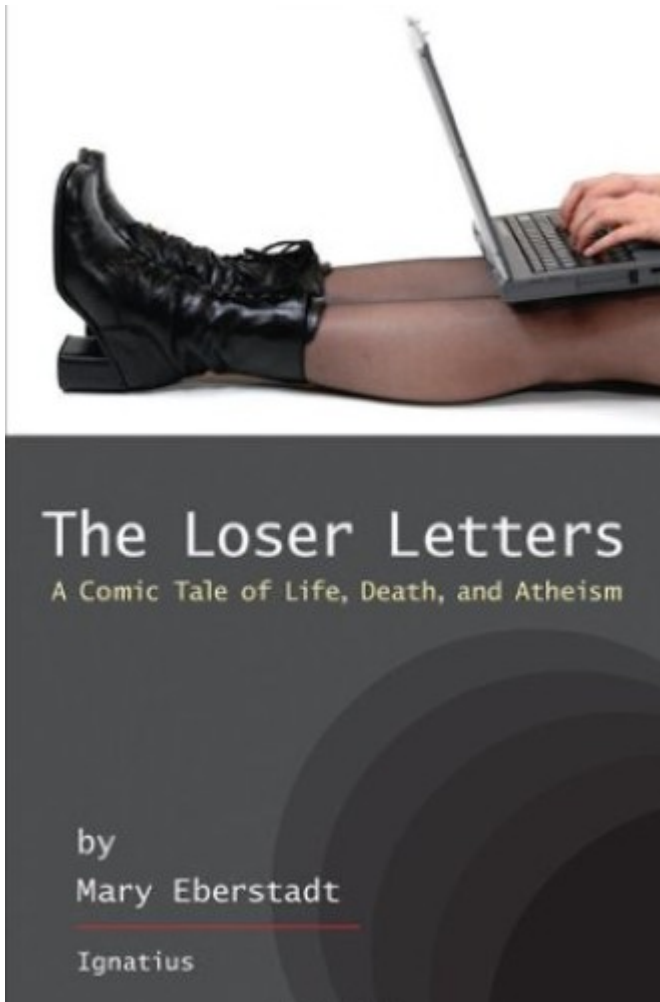


A review of The Loser Letters

Books in the [January 25, 2011](#) issue

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, Christopher Hitchens et al.) how to firm up their arguments. This is a breezy take on C. S. Lewis's *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. Look at the record when it comes to great art, good deeds and defending human dignity. Better to avoid those topics, she advises. "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." Eberstadt's setup makes it a bit too easy for her to score ideological points. Her fondness for her counterarguments offers a sharp contrast to the appealing humility of Lewis's approach in *Screwtape*, with its piercing perception of how the devil's arguments get inside believers. But it's a lively effort, and Eberstadt is especially effective in suggesting how the New Atheism might sound to youth who grew up in a culture of atheism.