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Snuff

By Vince Darcangelo, Special to the Rocky
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* **Fiction.** By *Chuck Palahniuk*. *Doubleday*, \$24.95. **Grade: A-**

Book in a nutshell: Cracking the spine of a Palahniuk novel, the reader can be certain of one thing: At some point they will be repulsed. And amused. In Palahniuk's hands, both are appropriate responses.

Few authors have captured the pathologies of modern life quite like Palahniuk, the best-selling author of *Fight Club*. *Snuff* takes

those pathologies to new depths of degradation, and the result is humorous, unsettling and ultimately thought-provoking in its take on abuse, celebrity, self-esteem and the quest for identity.

The setting for *Snuff* is the green room of a porno shoot, where 600 men are gathered to participate in the largest sex event in porn history. Each man will be having sex with aging starlet Cassie Wright, for whom the film will be a swan song - quite literally, as she doesn't intend to survive the shoot.

Amid the filth and desperation of the green room, three men huddle together - a past-his-prime porn star, a former TV star disgraced by his own porn past, and a young kid who may be Wright's biological son. Not all of their intentions are good.

Sample of prose: "He turns my hand palm-up, saying, 'No matter how hard you work or how smart you become, you'll always be known for that one poor choice.' He sets the blue pill on my palm, saying, 'Do that one wrong thing - and you'll be dead for the rest of your life.'"

Pros: *Snuff* is almost completely character-driven - a risky proposition for most authors. Not Palahniuk. The desperation and complexity of the characters drives the narrative, making *Snuff* a page-turner filled with tension and transgression.

Cons: *Snuff* features a series of revelations and character turns that are at first brilliant but conclude with an ending so ridiculous that it ruins what otherwise is one of the best reads of the year.

Final word: *Snuff* is an erotic dream. It builds and builds, delivering new heights of bliss with each new revelation, but the climax - the book's final, absurd twist - is as disappointing as the alarm clock that snaps the hottest dream ever.

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