



Fraud: Essays

By David Rakoff

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From *This American Life* alum David Rakoff comes a hilarious collection that single-handedly raises self-deprecation to an art form. Whether impersonating Sigmund Freud in a department store window during the holidays, climbing an icy mountain in cheap loafers, or learning primitive survival skills in the wilds of New Jersey, Rakoff clearly demonstrates how he doesn't belong—nor does he try to.

In his debut collection of essays, Rakoff uses his razor-sharp wit and snarky humor to deliver a barrage of damaging blows that, more often than not, land squarely on his own jaw—hilariously satirizing the writer, not the subject. Joining the wry and the heartfelt, *Fraud* offers an object lesson in not taking life, or ourselves, too seriously.

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Fraud: Essays By David Rakoff Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Let's get this out of the way: David Rakoff is not David Sedaris. When you hear him being incredibly smart and funny on *This American Life*, you invariably think, "Oh, it's David Sedaris." But if you listen closely, you can tell the difference. Rakoff, while no less witty or nasal, is a little more *disappointed*. In his first collection--a series of pieces for public radio and for various magazines--he positively revels in his world-weariness. Whether he's investigating the Loch Ness monster, attending a comedy festival in Aspen, Colorado, visiting a New Age retreat hosted by Steven Seagal, or just, you know, playing Freud in a department-store window at Christmastime, Rakoff tends to get comically depleted. Watching the comic Dan Castellaneta, for example, he writes, "It's a bad sign when I start counting the unused props on stage. Only two wigs, one stool, an easel, and a dropcloth to go. I begin to pray to an unfeeling God to please make Castellaneta multitask." In a piece where he attempts to climb a mountain (well... a very short hill), Rakoff immediately nips any Sierra Club fantasies in the bud: "I do not go outdoors. Not more than I have to. As far as I'm concerned, the whole point of living in New York City is indoors. You want greenery? Order the spinach." But in the end, what makes him such a terrific writer is that he's not only onto everyone else, he's onto himself. No wonder his visit to a kibbutz becomes the occasion for some supremely self-conscious amusement: "I know I sound like the Central Casting New Yorker I've turned myself into with single-minded determination when I say this, but the main problem with working in the fields is that the sun is just always shining." --*Claire Dederer*

From Publishers Weekly

A talented new humorist springs onto the scene: Rakoff has a rapier wit, slashing in all directions with slice-of-life insights and cutting remarks, sometimes nicking himself with self-deprecation in his dexterous duello with the American experience. Rakoff is a public radio personality, and his first collection contains his material from public radio's *This American Life* and from *Outside* and *Salon*, as well as a few new pieces. Assigned to visit a New Age retreat for a Buddhism workshop led by Steven Seagal, to look for elves in Iceland, to attend the Aspen Comedy Festival and to train at a wilderness survival camp, Rakoff endures urban dweller misadventures with a spin that occasionally remind one of Fran Lebowitz, such as during his hike up a New Hampshire mountain: "If only the mist would part to reveal a beautiful, beautiful parking lot, I will get through this." Outstanding is "Lush Life," a look at the delusions and despair of low-paid NYC editorial assistants, "complicit believers in the mythic glamour of a literary New York" yet forced to subsist on "salmonella-friendly" free snacks in "unhappening bars" where they can avoid former classmates with six-figure incomes. Rakoff can be as funny as Dave Barry or George Carlin, but he adds a touch of pathos, peeling away poignant layers unexplored by other humor writers. The author's woodcut illustrations are barely adequate, since the book cries out for Ralph Steadman art. The book cries out, period. (May 15)Forecast: With national print advertising and a national author tour in the offing, plus his radio exposure, Rakoff will quickly find his readership and they him. The crude pink marker scrawl of the title will make the book an eye-catching item in store displays.

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From Library Journal

Though replete with wit (Rakoff clearly prefers to provoke a smirk rather than a belly laugh), this book should not be relegated to the humor shelves. And despite the frequent use of first person, indeed the starring role the author often grants himself, most readers won't think of this as autobiography, much less memoir.

Journalist, actor, and radio commentator Rakoff has gathered in his first book what can best be described as essays on contemporary culture. The only real theme is his attitude self-deprecating when not self-doubting but no more enchanted with the rest of humanity and the contrivance of his position as irreconcilable outsider. By his own estimate, Rakoff is too thin, gay, Jewish, Canadian, and devoutly urban, while these essays find him climbing a New Hampshire mountain on Christmas day, reporting on the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, playing a modeling agent on a daytime soap, tagging along with Austrians invited to teach in the New York City public school system, and so forth. These situations, however, are mere excuses to expose small parts of the world in which we live. Rakoff's real talent, and there is plenty of it on display here, resides in his powers of social and personal analysis in the guise of description. Highly recommended for general collections. Eric Bryant, "Library Journal"

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Users Review

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