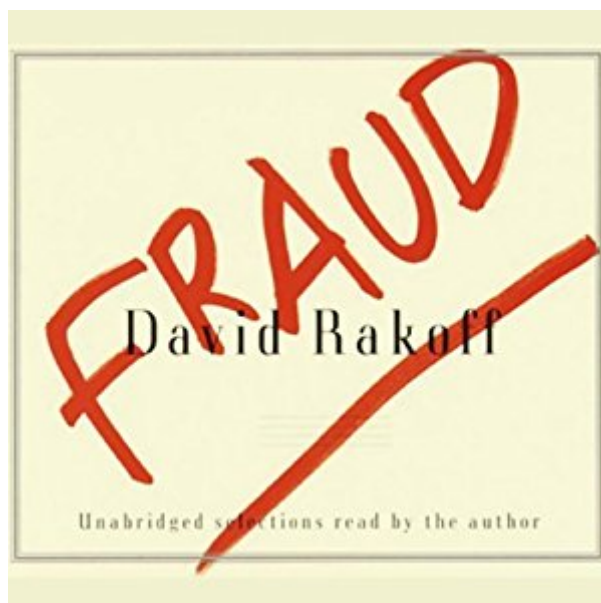


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# Fraud



## Synopsis

You've heard him on *This American Life*! Now read his book! Wherever he is, David Rakoff is a fish out of water. Whether impersonating Sigmund Freud in a department store window during the holidays, climbing an icy mountain in cheap loafers, playing an evil modeling agent on a daytime soap opera, or learning primitive survival skills in the wilds of New Jersey, Rakoff doesn't belong. Nor does he try to. Still, he continually finds himself off in the far-flung hinterlands of our culture, notebook or microphone in hand, hoping to conjure that dyed-in-the-wool New York condescension. And Rakoff tries to be nasty; heaven knows nothing succeeds like the cheap sneer, but he can't quite help noticing that these are actual human beings he's writing about. In his attempts not to pull any punches, the most damaging blows, more often than not, land squarely on his own jaw--hilariously satirizing the writer, not the subject. And therein lies David Rakoff's genius and his burgeoning appeal. The wry and the heartfelt join in his prose to resurrect that most neglected of literary virtues: wit. Read the blurbs again on the back. They signal the arrival of a brilliant new American essayist. (Okay, Canadian.) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I knew little about Mr. Rakoff (1964-2012) except a brief obituary aired on NPR. This was his first collection of essays which was published in 2001. I had few expectations beyond hearing he was a funny, insightful writer. Well, two pages into Mr. Rakoff's book and my impression was the guy sounded like the stereotype of a catty gay man. I had no idea if he was gay or not until page 13 and, as Jerry Seinfeld once said, "Not that there's anything wrong with that." But, mercy, the guy certainly

laid on thick the whiny, vituperative observations. Much like Wade Rouse's book "At Least in the City Someone Would Hear Me Scream," Mr. Rakoff makes many, many, MANY cultural references that few heterosexual men would know. I kept having to google oodles of obscure trivia. Some of his writing is very funny, but a lot of it is just nasty which I found to be off putting. The essays are a hodgepodge of personal experiences. The author goes mountain climbing in New Hampshire; recalls his early years of being a teenage, Jewish socialist; working as a gopher in New York City publishing; working in a Toronto ice cream parlor; attending a self-help retreat; visiting a soap opera set; taking undeserved potshots at Robin Williams; being a Christmas Freud display during the holidays; pursuing the Loch Ness Monster; joining a survival training workshop and revisiting Tokyo. Each work has its funny, insightful moments, but the snarky, condescending attitude permeates the entire book. I'm not sure if this was Mr. Rakoff's actual personality or just some shtick, but he comes across sometimes as a pretentious jerk and at other times as a insecure jerk. I'd be surprised if readers don't fall into either hating or liking Mr. Rakoff's stuff. There were times I wanted to just give up on the darned thing. Thankfully, it is a short work. What kept me interested is the author does have some very funny wordplay throughout it. His last piece in the book about having Hodgkin's disease was very good. No question, Mr. Rakoff was a talented writer, but reading a pile of his stuff at one time became more an endurance test for me in not throwing "Fraud" across the room and giving up on it.

This is David Rakoff and it is brilliant. There is nothing more that need be said. But I will add one thing: I got two of his books from the library and before I'd finished the second, I got on and bought every book he wrote, a painfully short list. Unlike all the books I own because I think I will reread them but never do, these I reread all the time, just take one from the shelf, open at random, and read. Glorious.

It's David Rakoff and he rocks. Or he did. The world is a sadder place without him in it. Essential reading if you feel the desire to have a broad smile break out across your face. Witty, word-wise, dry, sarcastic... David Rakoff fell into the same category as David Sedaris. I wish he'd had the time to pen more essay collections like this. Gone far too soon, a great talent.

I always enjoyed Rakoff on NPR, but took my time getting to his writing. That was a mistake, as he is an essayist with a distinctive style and voice. I have bought three collections now, and am only disappointed there cannot be more. An interesting, thoughtful voice stilled too early, he stands with

David Sedaris and Sarah Vowell. I would urge everyone to try at least one of his collections.

Mr Rakoff possesses a rare combination of intelligence, wit, compassion, and writing ability. A winning combination. Each story/ essay takes you to a unique place of humor, and experience. "I'm not just laughing, I'm learning, expanding" I don't usually like compilations, but the variety and sincerity of these pieces kept me captivated and wanting more.

David Rakoff was certainly taken before we were able to squeeze enough great works out of him. Knowing this while reading makes the words and mellifluous phrasing. This is a stitching of travel essays and stories of other travelers. His wit is striking and never a let down. Perfect reading for those with Kids since the chapters are self contained and easy to read in moments of peace. I am putting more of his writings into my cue as this is written.

Your average New Yorker may find this to be one of the funniest books ever written, seriously. Unfortunately no-one bothered to translate this book for the rest of the country. In this book, it is typical that David spends two paragraphs building up a scene, or a moment within the scene, to end it with a reference to some New Yorker, past or present, as some sort of punchline. Rakoff never bothers to explain, even for an instant, who in the hell these people are. For example, when someone is asked to move a tent pole a few inches because it was in the way of a lane that had been planned, Rakoff starts in like a professional comedian-- finding the humor in the monotonous. He starts in dryly expanding the idea of planning a path where people will walk into someone's vision of a vast tent city and ends it by comparing the person who planned the lane with Robert Moses. Quite funny if you know that Robert Moses was NY City's most powerful City Planner, and some of his history. Moses is probably the most mainstream of Rakoff's name-dropping punchlines. Others, I assume, revolve around NY's art, lit., and political scenes. Most of this could have been solved by simply adding titles to the names, like saying "former NY City City Planner Robert Moses" rather than just "Robert Moses." If you're a New Yorker, or well versed in New York culture, this book was literally written for you. For the rest of us, the book contains a lot of non-namedropping moments of sheer brilliance, but you have to be willing to drudge through all those worthless names to see it.

As usual, David Rakoff delivers some great stories. This is sure to delight those who are already his fans and convert those who are yet to join the rest of us.

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