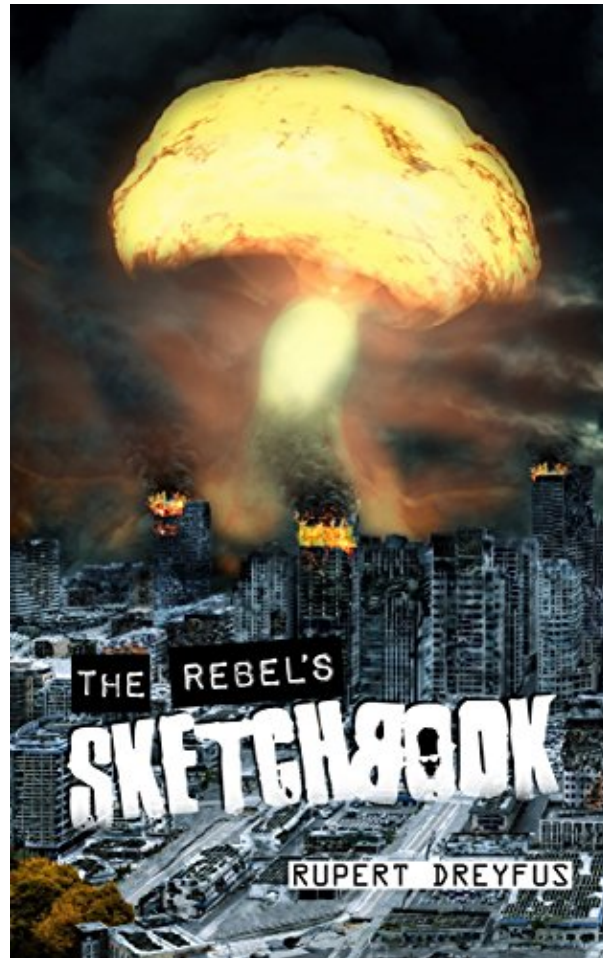
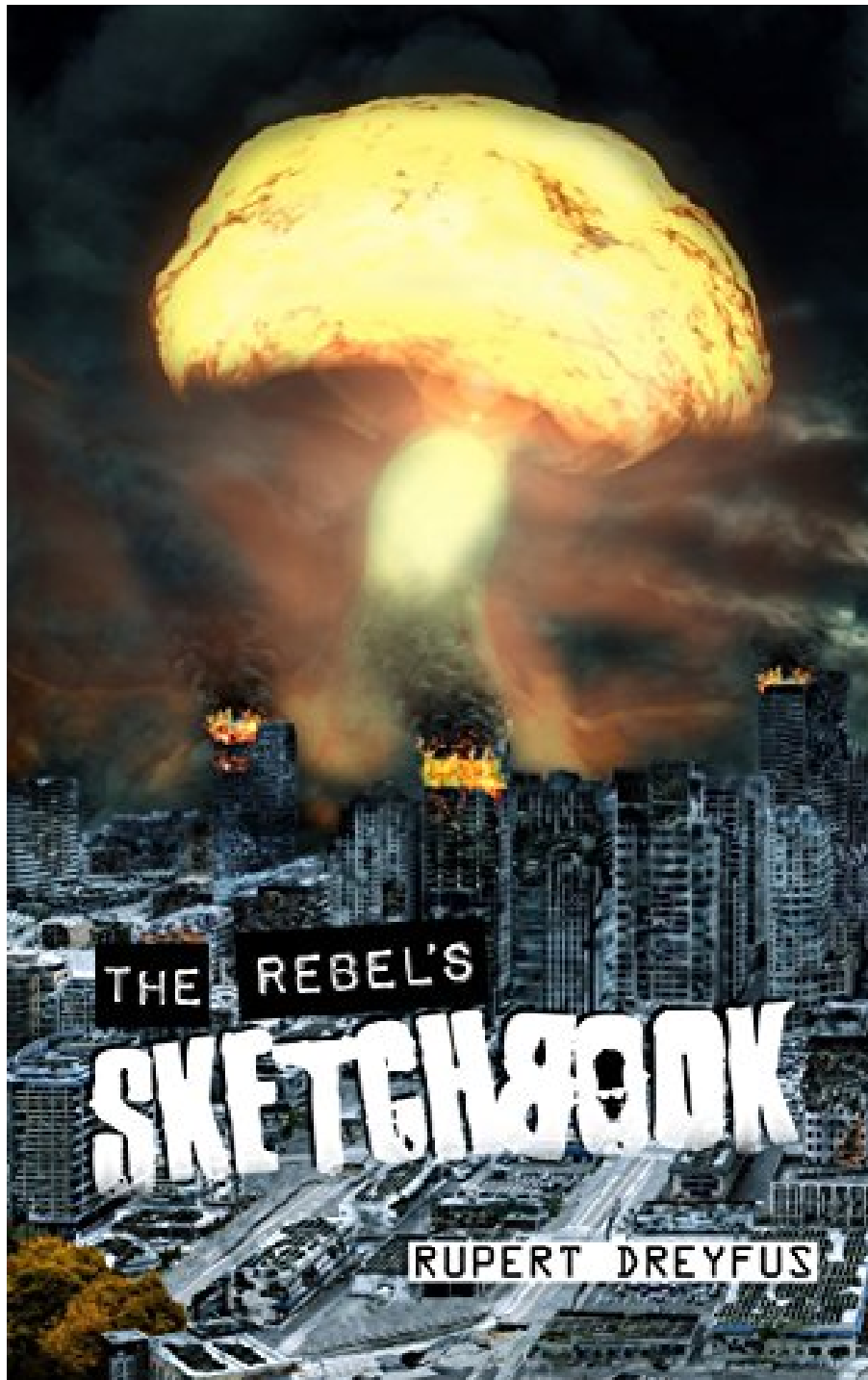


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"This is a scorchingly brilliant book and Dreyfus is an authentic and vital writer." - Morning Star

"In his tales of bored and jobless layabouts, internet superstars, corrupt politicians and weary observers of socio-economic collapse, Dreyfus manages an equally coy and poisonous dissertation on 20-something British life." - Pop Matters

Maniac world leaders; talentless boybands; Westminster politicians; social media idiots; zero-hour contracts. Rupert's first collection of short stories uses transgressive fiction, black comedy and satire as a weapon for shooting down all of these and more. Keeping the spirit of rebellion alive, *The Rebel's Sketchbook* is set to become one of the most controversial and challenging releases in a generation. Awarded one of the Morning Star's books of the year 2015.

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Apocalypse Now, please.

By KEVIN N COLE

I hope I never p\*\*\*\* off Rupert Dreyfus.

Because if I do, I'm confident I'll end up one of the cretins he hilariously exposes in his stories. And I'd rather be immortalized in other ways.

But while the gun's pointed at others, there's nothing but fun to be had, even with this collection of short stories. I say "even with" because short stories aren't really my bag. I was traumatized in college lit classes, instructed to hunt the text for Symbolism and Irony in this "short piece" by William Faulkner, "better known for his novels."

Despite that, I can appreciate the point and pleasure of a short story. And done the right way, as Dreyfus does in *The Rebel's Sketchbook*, a short story has all the pleasures of a one-night stand, even if your preference is a long-term love affair.

Oddly enough, reading these stories - or sketches - about people who could only exist in 2015, I kept thinking of reruns of a show I watched as a kid - a show that had died before I was born. *The Twilight Zone* featured normal people in abnormal situations that, thirty minutes later, weren't always resolved on a comforting note. And so it is here: *The Twilight Zone*, as hosted by William S. Burroughs, let's say.

To be a protagonist in a Dreyfus story is to be a sort of Everyman or Everybod - someone who's smart but

powerless, finding himself in the worst situations with the worst types. Not criminals, necessarily, but just plain annoying people, who come off as hilarious on the Kindle, but if you were the one having to deal with such in real life, you'd be singing to yourself, "Come, / Come, / Nuclear bomb!"

Not all the stories work, but those that do are fantastic punches to the face. I thought "Sentenced" would be my fave because its structure is perfect. But right after that is "Cleo's Encounter," which closes on an unexpectedly emotional note. I really felt for Cleo. So his story is the best, in my opinion. Coming in at No. 3 is "Martha," a politically-incorrect tour de force that cracks me up every time I remember it. "Mo's Lesson" was also great, mirroring my own teenage self.

Dreyfus' style is described as transgressive. I thought I knew what that meant. I guess I don't. To me, his voice is simple and to the point. He rides the bike of his narrative without stopping to look at every detail of the landscape: an approach that, mixed with angry humor, is fun and easy to read.

And these are real stories, with a beginning, middle and end. Does the author have an ax to grind? A grander editorial point to make? Sure, but he skillfully does not let that interfere with what's more important, the entertainment of a story.

That's the mark of the real deal, and in today's ocean of indie phonies, Jaws Dreyfus deserves to chomp into chum his competition.

I also have to note a curious aspect of the Sketchbook. The stories seem to exist in the same universe, with references in one story to characters or events in another, including Dreyfus' other book, the novel Spark. I like that. Frank Zappa did the same in his songs and albums, an approach he called "conceptual continuity."

I really want to give the Sketchbook five stars but two stories frustrated me a little. "Hotel Scum" deserved to be twice as long. It seemed to end just when I was sure s\*\*\* was about to hit the fan. And "Eat Na\$ty" could've been stellar, but as one who grew up with the type of American Southern white trash portrayed, I think I could've offered a few pointers to make it just right in the eyes of a native.

But don't let those two discourage you from reading this book and, once more, having fun, laughing at the squares.

Sample: "Coniston Water is a pretty place. It has some old wooden rowing boats and a steam yacht bobbing up and down on it, and all around are these sprawling mountains. It feels very wild, like behind every cluster of trees you'd find a gorilla taking a s\*\*\*."

If you don't think that's funny, I want you to go away.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Laughter and vomit

By Mike Robbins

Few books can make you laugh and vomit at the same time. At least two stories in Rupert Dreyfus's short-story collection *The Rebel's Sketchbook* do this. It's quite an achievement. In fact I am sure most major publishers would run screaming from this book, which is a good reason to read it.

Rupert Dreyfus does satire. Not the rapier-wit sort of satire; more a sort of blunt-force trauma. To read his stories is a bit like being beaten over the head with a cricket bat, but you laugh anyway. Thus in one of these stories, *Eat Nasty*, rival YouTube bloggers compete to see who can eat the most disgusting crap on-screen –

and wind up eating themselves. Other stories also deal with social media and the virtual world. In *Hatchet Job*, a fanatical gamer runs out of money but is sure he can get work as a hit-man, because he's so good at it in the game of that name. In *Hotel Scum*, a bunch of punks are about to be evicted from their run-down slum, but hack into the landlord's PC and find he has an unusual fetish. (I won't reveal what it is, but apparently it's not unknown.)

As in any collection, some stories work better than others. *Dead Man's Blunt* is told from the point of view of a marijuana cigar; it's inventive and sometimes very funny, but in the end it didn't quite work for me. The story *Dreyfus* offers as a postscript, *Ice Age Coming*, was a little too direct. When he is good, though, Dreyfus really is good. The story that had me throwing up and laughing at the same time, *Martha*, is completely revolting and very, very funny. *Outrage*, in which upstanding citizens turn into zombies and attack people on benefits, is a blunt but apposite comment on where we're going in our treatment of the poor.

*Outrage* is a clue as to what's driving Dreyfus. In an afterword to *The Rebel's Sketchbook*, he says: "There is nothing admirable about being obedient to a system that doesn't serve you. The present system we endure day in, day out is designed to turn us against each other while a minority of people get rich off our backs, destroying the planet in the process. ... Many people accept that this is the natural order of all things and they call it democracy." These sound like pretty modern thoughts. In fact, I think Dreyfus is part of an English tradition of bawdy dissent and the bellowed curse that stretches back through Gillray, Hogarth, John Wilkes and back into the stews of Elizabethan London. It's never gone away, but the rise of Facebook and Twitter, and the digital revolution in publishing, has seen it come back to the fore with a vengeance. *The Rebel's Sketchbook* is part of this, as is Dreyfus's other book so far, a witty and fast-moving novel called *Spark*.

I really look forward to seeing what Dreyfus does next. In the end, he may need to expand into new directions; the trouble with the bellowed curse is that you get a sore throat in the end. There's mileage in it yet, though. *The Rebel's Sketchbook* works. It might not be subtle, but these stories are a shrewd, funny and provocative take on modern life. Now let me get that vomit cleaned up.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

it was an excellent read that kept me guessing throughout the experience

By David Heath

I just finished *The Rebel's Sketchbook*, and as I expected from Rupert Dreyfus, it was an excellent read that kept me guessing throughout the experience.

This is a collection of several short stories that loosely relate to each other in themes and/or characters. There are also a few references to Dreyfus's previous novel, *'Spark'*, sprinkled throughout which is a nice touch that adds a little continuity to his increasingly big and interesting transgressive version of England. In the future, I hope that the mythologies and stories that have been started both here and in *'Spark'* will continue to grow into a larger and expansive world!

*The Rebel's Sketchbook* is funny at times, haunting in others, sad and depressing and absurd, and this is a true compliment to the book. It's rare that one work can evoke so many emotions in such a short amount of space, and it never feels disjointed or disconnected. The central themes that run through all of the stories is one of anarchy and rebellion against a greater and corrupt system, and this will surely resonate with many people around the world.

In short story collection reviews, it's probably customary to pick a favorite and share it, so I'll do just that. I enjoyed *'Mo's Lesson'* the most. It's the tale of a disassociated young worker who is unhappy with the realization that they'll likely be locked into a meaningless, droning office job for the rest of their life, and the

actions they take to avoid that outcome. Perhaps the story hit close to home for me, but it's well-written and is one of the standouts that really makes you empathize with the character.

The only minor criticism that I'd aim at the book is that it doesn't often go far enough to explain WHY we should rebel against the system. For a person reading the book who is already fully on the side of anarchy and rebellion, it is a love-letter and will be completely understood. But, if someone who had never expressed any problems with the "system" previously picked it up, they might not understand where all of the anger is coming from.

Regardless, this was an excellent read, and I can't wait to see what comes next from Rupert Dreyfus!

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