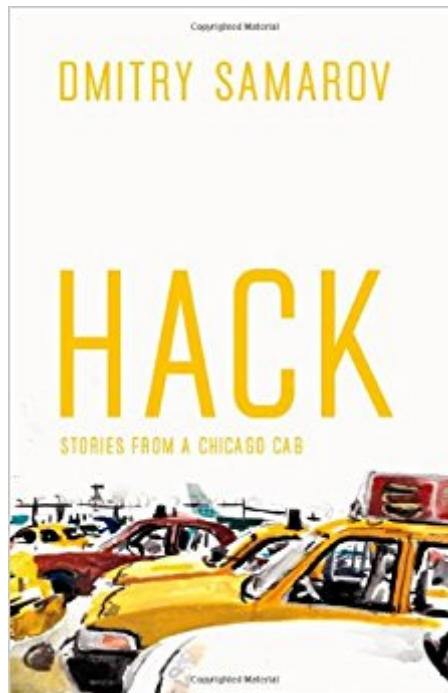




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# Hack: Stories From A Chicago Cab (Chicago Visions And Revisions)



## Synopsis

Cabdrivers and their yellow taxis are as much a part of the cityscape as the high-rise buildings and the subway. We hail them without thought after a wearying day at the office or an exuberant night on the town. And, undoubtedly, taxi drivers have stories to tell—of farcical local politics, of colorful passengers, of changing neighborhoods and clandestine shortcuts. No one knows a city's streets—and thus its heart—better than its cabdrivers. And from behind the wheel of his taxi, Dmitry Samarov has seen more of Chicago than most Chicagoans will hope to experience in a lifetime. An artist and painter trained at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Samarov began driving a cab in 1993 to make ends meet, and he's been working as a taxi driver ever since. In *Hack: Stories from a Chicago Cab*, he recounts tales that will delight, surprise, and sometimes shock the most seasoned urbanite. We follow Samarov through the rhythms of a typical week, as he waits hours at the garage to pick up a shift, ferries comically drunken passengers between bars, delivers prostitutes to their johns, and inadvertently observes drug deals. There are long waits with other cabbies at O'Hare, vivid portraits of street corners and their regular denizens, amorous Cubs fans celebrating after a game at Wrigley Field, and customers who are pleasantly surprised that Samarov is white—and tell him so. Throughout, Samarov's own drawings—of his fares, of the taxi garage, and of a variety of Chicago street scenes—accompany his stories. In the grand tradition of Nelson Algren, Saul Bellow, Mike Royko, and Studs Terkel, Dmitry Samarov has rendered an entertaining, poignant, and unforgettable vision of Chicago and its people.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Samarov captures the most shocking and, sometimes, quietly poignant tales. . . . When chatty barflies, clandestine drug buyers, inebriated sports fans, and prostitutes mentally preparing for johns pour out to their cab driver on a nightly basis, the truth is stranger than fiction." (TimeOut Chicago 2011-07-26)

"Fact: I first rode in Dmitry's cab when he was driving in Boston in 1993. He owned the first cellular phone that I ever saw, and he has been broadcasting back from the strange frontier of hack life ever since. He's a good driver, but more than that, he's as skilled a navigator of the forgotten American city as you'll find, and his writing is funny, grim, humane, and welcome." (John Hodgman, author of *More Information than You Require* 2010-02-15)

"Nobody dreams of being a cabdriver but many of us get sidetracked. Dmitry Samarov, an art school grad, is one such lost soul. This book, which combines his passion and his detour, is an evocative and accurate look at the life of a big city hack. Drop a few extra bills over the front seat. Mr. Samarov rates a sizable tip." (Jack Clark, author of *Nobody's Angel*)

"Hack is one man's witness to a contrary, luminous, and difficult city. Samarov's city is also Algren's city, Terkel's city, Royko's city. . . . Except Dmitry Samarov gets closer, moving while the city sleeps, and having an actual dialogue with its denizens; we take his journey, through the cruelties and comedies. Think of Zola if he was driving a cab and had Samarov's mordant gallows humor and humanity as his guide. Dmitry Samarov testifies to our messy, contradictory, and vital city." Tony Fitzpatrick (Tony Fitzpatrick)

"[Samarov's] book, organized by the days of the week, is thin and enveloping, full of the kind of insights only a veteran cab driver would have. . . . The book is also so attuned to the nuances of cab life, a thought repeatedly springs to mind as you read it: Your cab driver is aware of you. More than you realize." Chicago Tribune (Chicago Tribune)

"Samarov drives late afternoon and into the night, the best time to cull material to create his vibrant, detailed stories that would make Nelson Algren proud. He has that very Chicago knack for succinctly capturing the city's neighborhoods and the characters that inhabit them." Chicago Sun-Times (Chicago Sun-Times)

"With Dmitry Samarov's *Hack: Stories from a Chicago Cab*, the University of Chicago Press has produced a work about the Windy City that could not be grittier or more up-to-the-minute. . . . These vignettes constitute a work of ground-level urban sociology, showing parts of Chicago life that few

novelists or academics could access. (Barnes and Noble Review) "Samarov not only writes insightful dialogue and reportage of cabbish interaction among his passengers and with himself, but also, following Tom Wolfe perhaps, has illustrated his short book with dozens of his own sketches that seem a combination of Ben Shahn and Reginald Marsh (especially in Dos Passos's U.S.A.). They work wonderfully well with his prose. (Contemporary Sociology)"Utterly addictive. . . . Samarov manages to capture the essential oddity of the ephemeral relationship between driver and fare, that fleeting intersection of guide and guided." (TriQuarterly)

Dmitry Samarov earned his BFA in painting and printmaking at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1993 and began driving a cab that same year. His work has been shown at the Chicago Tourism Center, the Merchandise Mart, the Bowery Gallery, and Brandeis University. Samarov is the creator of the blog Hack, stories from which have been featured in the Chicago Reader and elsewhere. Â

I take cabs a lot in Chicago and every once in a while a cabbie has a book, usually self-published, with stories of his experiences. I always buy it, even though usually they're like listening to your weird uncle tell stories about his one trip to Hong Kong. This book, though, is in a different class from any other cabbie book I've read. The stories are more insightful, and from a place of better understanding and humanity than others I've read. Whether you personally find it to be as well-written as something by Studs Terkel or Mike Royko is a matter of opinion, but for me the spirit and man-of-the-people ethos in it puts it in that league. Anyone who likes intimate and intelligent stories about life in a big city, or just life in general should enjoy this book.

I confess that I know Dmitry (he is a customer of mine). Having lived near and worked in downtown Chicago for decades, I love his stories of day to day strangeness that he encountered driving a cab.

...doesn't like most of what he sees, but appreciates that which he does. I've patrolled, in my own way, many of the streets the author depicts, and I was pleased to find our impressions of the city line up. I recognized the people and places he was talking about. That said, I'm glad I never got a ride from this guy.

The book was a good afternoon read, the only problem I had with it was that it was too short, it did give some insight to just how hard a job it is to drive a cab, it has to be one of the most difficult and

dangerous jobs there is.

Mesmerizing potent, an open door to a particular view of the city. Honest and well constructed. Glad I got it.

Interesting book that should have been longer. I feel the author should have went into more detail with some of the stories.

I was a bartender for fifteen years, and some of the smartest, most creative people I know work behind steering wheels and bars. But people who haven't spent time on that side of the service sector probably will be surprised when they read Samarov's debut, *Hack: Stories From a Chicago Cab*, because this slim volume unfolds with a complexity and humanity not often found in memoirs twice its size. Organized by days (Monday - Sunday), *Hack* is illustrated throughout with Samarov's distinctive drawings and paintings. His writing style is straightforward and spiked with keen observations. He describes the people he encounters during a typical week--fares, other cabbies, cops--with empathy, even when their actions or speech make the reader squirm. Mostly, Samarov drives and listens. His ear for dialogue is as finely tuned as his painter's eye, and the passengers he quotes (and paints) are sometimes funny and sometimes pathetic. They are drunk or high or horny; racist, arrogant, or wise. It's his job to deliver them to point B, and that's what he does, listening to them while the meter runs, choosing his spoken words carefully, if at all. He also shares the drudgery of the job, the long waits for fares at the airport and for mechanical repairs at the garage. Between bouts with boredom and hectic traffic and obnoxious fares, moments of inspiration and humanity and humor come along in unexpected places at unexpected times. One of the most surprising stories involves a pair of amorous Cubs fans en route from Wrigleyville to their suburban home in Downer's Grove. *Hack* helped me gain a new appreciation for cabbies, generally, and Dmitry Samarov, the artist, specifically. In about 125 pages of selective accounts of the people he encounters on the job, he is revealed more honestly than most memoirists are in several hundred pages of soul-baring testimony. It's the sense of dignity he brings to these pages, I think, that sets his book apart. He avoids pronouncements and often keeps his thoughts about the people he encounters to himself, choosing instead to allow the reader to come to our own conclusions. In that way, we learn about the cabbie/author as we learn about ourselves. It's a surprising, complicated, revelatory ride.

Dmitry Samarov's "Hack: Stories from a Chicago Cab," is an excellent series of vignettes of fares he's picked up over the years. A short book, it's suitable to be read all at one sitting or dipped into now and then, and it's filled with the oddball characters we've all seen on the streets and wondered about. Samarov neutrally and perceptively fills us in on where they went next. If I have one complaint about the book it's that almost ALL the stories are about weirdos, and it makes it seem like the back of a cab is a zoo or something. On the other hand, having spent my share of time in the back seat of cabs, I can only hope I'm one of the boring ones that weren't profiled. Lots of Chicago landmarks - Samarov gives a real feel for our streets. Give it to a city-lover as a holiday gift.

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