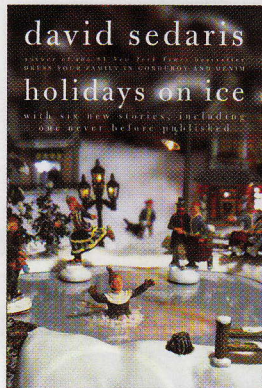


Christmas Snark and Spirit

By Ciara LaVelle



Holiday-themed literature tends to fall into the “warm and fuzzy” category; tales filled with simple plots and even simpler morality. Significant life lessons come to light as family members reconnect, as gifts are given and received, as characters celebrate their formerly neglected, priceless blessings.

In *Holidays on Ice*, on the other hand, you’ll read about greedy TV producers, abused prostitutes and shopper after dysfunctional shopper waiting in line to sit on a mall Santa’s lap. They don’t always learn significant life lessons. In fact, the most offensive characters often overlook the most glaring ironies of their greed and insensitivity. But that doesn’t make their stories any less enjoyable.

The collection of short stories ranges from essays in memoir form—recounting author David Sedaris’ quirky holiday memories, like one Christmas season spent working as an elf in SantaLand at Macy’s—to short fiction told in the form of holiday letters and pulpit speeches. Through racist shoppers, cruel reviewers of children’s pageants and even murderous farmyard cows, Sedaris’ characteristic sharp and snarky descriptions bring each character to life in ridiculous detail.

Though it’s primarily a Christmas-themed collection, several stories take place against the backdrop of other U.S. holidays. A stint in the medical examiner’s office adds new meaning to Halloween, for example. But it’s the Christmas stories that have the greatest impact, adding just a touch of sentimentality to the dry humor. After weeks of processing mall shoppers through the Santa line at Macy’s, suffering obnoxious parents, whiny kids and quirky coworkers throughout, the author begins to actually enjoy his work. Comparing Dutch and American holiday traditions, he takes pride in the country’s wacky, often paradoxical customs. And when, just before Christmas, his sister brings home a prostitute she met at work, he winds up enjoying an evening of family togetherness.

Think of it as a twist on the traditional “warm and fuzzy.”