



The California Roll

John Vorhaus

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Meet Radar Hoverlander, a witty, gifted con artist with the mind of David Mamet, the voice of Tom Robbins, and the morals of a sailor on shore leave.

What do the Merlin Game, the Penny Skim, the Doolally Snadoodle, and the Afterparty Snuke have in common? They're all the work of world-class con artist and master bafflegabber Radar Hoverlander. Radar's been "on the snuke" since childhood, but he's still looking for his California Roll, the one big scam that'll set him up in sushi for life.

Trouble arrives in the stunning, sassy package of Allie Quinn, either the last true innocent or a con artist so slick she makes Radar look like a Quaker. Radar's hapless sidekick, Vic Mirplo, a lovable loser who couldn't con a kid out of a candy cane, thinks Radar's being played. But if love is blind, it's also deaf, dumb and stupid, and before Radar knows it, he's sucked into a vortex of double-, triple-, quadruple-crosses that'll either net him his precious California Roll or put him in a hole in the ground.

As timeless as a perpetual-motion machine, as timely as a Madoff arraignment, *The California Roll* brings you deep inside the world of con artistry, where every fact is fiction and the second liar never has a chance.

The California Roll Details

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From Reader Review The California Roll for online ebook

Rosa says

Grifters!

The Nate Gatsby says

I really loved this book. It was funny and entertaining while also really well written. You can tell the author really loves the English language with all the little-used words he threw around.

Heather says

Radar Hoverlander is a grifter- a con artist -and like every grifter, he's seeking his California Roll. Which means to say that he is seeking his one big take that will set him up with sushi for life, and allow him to ride off into the sunset to live a charmed life of hot sands and cold beers. Then he meets up with fellow grifter Allie, and he has to begin to wonder whether he just bit off more than he can chew.

This was a fun and “smart” story. Full of clever dialogue, a twisting plotline, and more new-to-me vocabulary words than I can even mention in this review, I found it to be fresh and engaging.

There’s something likable about Radar Hoverlander. You almost get the feeling that he’s “honorable”, despite him being a con artist. Is there such a thing as an honorable con artist?

Radar finds himself surrounded by his ragtag team of fellow grifters. And grifters always seem to be trying to wind up as the man on top, always trying to outdo one another. And, really, how does a player trust a player not to play them?

Allie had me as stumped as she did Radar, wondering what her game was. You want to believe that she is real, but can you really trust her to be on the up and up?

There are some mild sex scenes, crudity and occasional vulgarity, but all of it is appropriate to the story and the characters involved. There was no real gratuity (other than gratuitous usage of pedantic vocabulary- which I loved!)

There are interesting footnotes in the book, but they are used more parenthetically than in the traditional sense that footnotes are used. The character Radar even has a website in the book that is an actual website used by the author: radarenterprizes.com

This book had so many twist and turns, I thought I may have to file a lawsuit against the author for whiplash! A fun read that I would definitely recommend!

Erik Malvick says

that would be a lie, and that is part of the problem with this novel...

Here you have a character based novel about a con man. Now as far as character based novels go, I love them. The focus is really on what is inside the main character's head. The problem is that, the protagonist in this book is a liar. Now, that isn't a bad thing... at first. Afterall, this is a story about a con man, and in the first chapter you are basically told that everything could be a lie, and by the time you are a few chapters in you know that not only that he is a liar, but everyone you meet in this book (potentially) is.

In a lot of regards, this book works from the point of view it is told, and relying heavily on the thoughts of the protagonist, it gets to be fun... for a while. The unfortunate part is that at about halfway through the book the lies start to get old and the twists get to be a bit too much. It almost seems that the author took a little of a good thing and took it a bit too far. It almost feels like the author was trying to see just how confusing he could make the story just to prove he could. That isn't to say that the book is really that confusing. It is mostly an easy read, and the plot isn't too difficult to follow. It is just that there is so many lies in there that you get a bit tired of it. It gets a bit boring. Every character is a liar and it seems like everything that is said is a con.

The author has a lot of great potential, but the book really has too much of that quick hollywood blockbuster type feel to it that could have been backed off. The author could have cut down on the plot and developed a few more aspects of it. As a character study it starts to get a bit too much action towards the end, and it feels like it takes a way just a bit towards the end. The other thing I kind of hated was the ego the author injects by way of the protagonist with respect to vocabulary. Perhaps it is meant only to be part of the protagonists quirks, but the dropping of supposedly "big" words and the reminder of what they mean made me feel like the author wants to either prove he knows how to use a dictionary, which is ridiculous, or he just wants to make the reader feel a little less in an otherwise simply written novel.

A little bit of further development, I would have rated this a 5 star novel. As it is, it is still a fun and quick read. It is quick enough and does have its fun aspects. I just wish that in terms of plot, the story would have been shortened by a few chapters and perhaps the character developed a bit further. In otherwords, a shorter plot with a slower paced read would make a great book. Instead, you have what feels like a glorified script, which is fitting since the author is a screenwriter.

Anna says

Notes below copied from my notes about the book back in 2010 - the book I read has some traveled, hopefully quite far.

"Hmm... where did I read again that this would be a detective? Nothing to detect, or at least, no one is dead, and no one turns out dead.

What is left to detect is everything around Radar Hoverlander. The master scammer, who is getting paranoid about getting scammed...

Pretty funny, mostly thanks to the language. Lots of nice images painted with the words, but maybe more of them are like the "pornographic memory" that was so many times in this book. I saw last Sunday the old

episode of the Simpsons where they open the casino in Springfield, and the pornographic memory was there, a homersimpsonism of years ago.

Something on the last page kind of turned me down (something around one of the "not really"s). But, oh well, other than that, overall enjoyable, and I'll keep my eyes open for the next readers for it... "

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Radar Hoverlander, con artist

RATING: 3.25

Radar Hoverlander has been a con artist since childhood. Even in grade school, he pulled off some elementary snukes (scams or the people who perform them). Now he's considered one of the experts in the field. Consequently, he is quite surprised when he suspects that someone is pulling a snuke on him. He meets Allie Quinn at a Halloween party, and she effortlessly leads him around by the nose. Radar isn't sure if she is really that good at the game, or if she is an innocent who just appears to be conning. What he does know is that he can't get her off his mind, which is something unique in his life. Because of his profession, he has learned not to trust anyone.

Radar's inept sidekick, Vic Mirplo, believes that Radar is being played. Despite the fact that he thinks Mirplo may be right, Radar agrees to teach Allie's grandfather the art of the con and puts together a very profitable snuke that the older man will help run. The situation rapidly goes off the rails; before you can say "scam", everyone is double crossing everyone else. The one good thing is that Radar gets to meet a fellow con artist named William Yuan, and they plan the ultimate snuke, the "California Roll", which involves manipulation of financial institutions in China.

There's no doubt that Radar is an expert grifter, but it seems he is a bit off his game. Is it because for the first time in his life he is experiencing love for another person? Or has he reached the point where the schemes and scams just don't seem all that unique any more? What happens if they are successful at pulling off the California Roll? What is left to accomplish after running one of the biggest snukes ever?

I almost always enjoy books featuring con artists. I love to see them developing ingenious schemes and watching how they play out. Where THE CALIFORNIA ROLL falters is when it moves the focus off the snuke and on to the relationships. Given the cast of characters, we can be pretty sure that everyone is scamming everyone else and that we will be surprised by what is actually happening beneath the surface. Vorhaus engages in a bit too much of swapping allegiances and making us distrust what is going on between the players. The end result is that the snuke becomes secondary.

I would have enjoyed the book more if there had been less focus on the secondary characters and more on the snuke. In particular, I didn't care for Radar's partner, Mirplo, who totally betrayed him. When reading a book about a con artist, you expect that the spotlight will be on the con and that you will be beguiled by how it is carried out. The fact that the snuke became almost an afterthought was disappointing.

Greg Spry says

Radar Hoverlander...the main protagonist's name alone tells you this book is going to be entertaining, and it doesn't disappoint. The first line of chapter one provides an instant hook rife with playful conflict. John Vorhaus loves his wordplay, which is clever and witty. The general concept and life of a con man carries an inherent "forbidden fruit" sort of appeal, and the author works this angle expertly from beginning to end. The plot features multiple twists and turns that kept me guessing. As both a reader and an author, I've always most enjoyed stories where the lead character is a do-gooder at heart. While Radar is a con man, he's still a good guy deep down.

Overall, I highly recommend it.

Sandi says

I won an ARC of this book through Crown Publishing Group's Read It Forward program.

The California Roll: A Novel is a very clever novel. It's basically a cross between "The Sting" and "Paper Moon" set in modern-day Los Angeles. There were moments in the first few chapters when I laughed out loud. Sadly, the cleverness wore thin for me about 50 pages in and it never really picked up the momentum. Vorhaus' writing style reminded me a lot of Tom Wolfe's in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, which I loved.

This is one case where I suspect my failure to fully enjoy this book was more my state of mind than the quality of the novel. It is a humorous novel and humor is always subjective.

April Khaito says

"I don't have much experience with tequila, but I know you've had too much when you go to brush something off your shoulder and it's the floor." That sentence alone is worth the price of the book. John Vorhaus has a way of sucking you in with his twisting story and witty anecdotes.

Jenine says

Charming for the gift of gab/vocab alone. I liked the first two thirds better than the end but ends are hard. I pulled this off the shelf because I saw the next one in the series: *The Albuquerque Turkey*. Kinda have to get that one.

Turi says

Excellent, snappy novel about a L.A. based con artist who gets too wrapped up in his own "snuke." The language is wonderful - lingo and inside puns that sometimes don't catch up with you until the next line. Some passages feel like they should be accompanied by a brushed high hat. Bewilderingly twisted plot, as

befits the subject, but not too hard to follow. I'll be looking for more from Vorhaus.

Wendy says

For the most part, 'The California Roll' is a fun book as it takes the reader into the heart of the world of grifters. It has a distinct narrator voice (Radar Hoverlander) and his little group of rivals/associates all share the same language. There are also clear points of action in the story. What made it a little less interesting was the slabs of explanation of 'wheres/whats/whyfores' that rob the story of its bright and modern spirit. Some of the resolutions are all-too-easily wrapped up in neat packages of explanation. It almost seemed to me as though this had firstly been written as a treatment for a film and then padded out into a book as I could see a fair measure of strain in describing the end of tale climax, its location and action. I do enjoy books that take me into a world about which I know very little (eg. Doug Danielson's Jake Mortensen series) but sometimes Vorhaus became repetitive. The concept is terrific though and yes, it would make an excellent film as he has managed to make his lying, cheating protagonist likeable.

Natalie says

ridiculous book but oh what fun the author has with language and dialog - and plenty entertaining enough to keep me listening -

almost as if he kept a journal entry for each turn of phrase he ever heard that humored, pleased irritated or charmed him and then invented characters to speak the lines and a plot to hang the script off

- whatever the method this writing gave me more than a smile or two !

John says

Oh, what a joy this was to read -- full of linguistic inventiveness and often outrageously funny.

Radar Hoverlander is a highly successful grifter: he makes a good living by running scams, relying on his wits and his innate talents for bafflegab. When he runs into the lovely Allie Quinn at a party that he's crashed, he soon realizes he's met his match -- which doesn't stop him wanting to get her under the Radar, so to speak. It seems all she wants him to do is educate her grandfather, a retired investment broker, into the new hobby he's eager to try: scamming. But Allie's supposed grandfather isn't who he seems, and neither is the cop who's come all the way from Australia in search of master hacker/scammer Billy Yuan and insists Radar help in that quest. Matters aren't being helped in the slightest by Radar's sidekick Vic Mirplo, the dumbest scammer of them all. With constantly shifting allegiances, new revelations at every turn, and no one -- even Radar -- ever necessarily being who they claim to be, things could hardly get more complicated; even so, they're not as simple as they seem . . .

There are countless good lines. Here, chosen more or less at random, are a couple to give you a flavor of the rest:

I don't have a lot of experience with tequila, but I know you've had too much when you go to

brush something off your shoulder and it's the floor.

I swear to God, before senility sweeps over me, I'm going to put together a lethal dose of sleeping pills and keep them by my bed with a note that reads, "When you forget what these are for, take them."

If you like Donald Westlake's comedy thrillers and Carl Hiaasen's Florida novels, you should leap at this. The language dances along and there's the constant fascination of the scams themselves, as if a conjurer were explaining the secrets of her most mystifying illusions: I don't know how much of the information here on scams and scamming is actually authentic, but it certainly *reads* as if it is.

My only real quibble with the book is that, toward the end, the plot gets *so* convoluted that it began to overburden proceedings: there's a real or faked doublecross or two too many. But that's a relatively small objection.

I noticed on coming to Goodreads this morning that this is apparently vol 1 in a series, and my heart sank. The book's complete in itself. There is absolutely no need (aside from the obvious mercenary one) to inflate it into a series.

Jody says

Although he is likable, he is such a con that you never know who's conning who. And indeed he cons, gets conned, cons back, double crosses, triple crosses. You really never know what's going on. Or who to trust. The girl friend is conning him. Wait, no she isn't. Oh, she's working for the feds. Wait, no she isn't. She's working with another con. Wait, no she isn't. Same with his buddy, Vic. He's in, he's out, he's working with him, he's working against him. Yikes.

I also think there's too much description of the different cons. I really don't need to know all the names, and all the nuances. At the end I didn't even care who was zoomin' who.
