

OPEN

Look-Alike Option

BALLSY IVY LEAGUERS ARE BACK YET AGAIN IN THE LATEST FROM BEN MEZRICH

READS

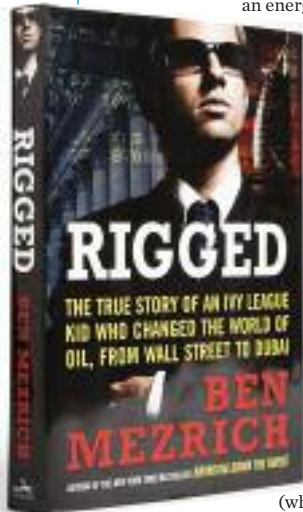
A TWENTYSOMETHING Harvard Business School graduate visits a foreign country, romps with models, conducts some shady back-alley business and single-handedly revolutionizes the financial markets. Sound familiar? No, it's not *Ugly Americans Part Deux: The Smell of Fear* — it's *Rigged*, the latest from Ben Mezrich's seemingly bottomless well of "nonfiction" novels chronicling the lives of young hot-shot Ivy League financial pirates out to take over the world.

This time around, Mezrich pens the tale of David Russo, a New York kid who, fresh from grad school, is asked to become the protégé of his powerful idol, Anthony Giovanni. He quickly ditches his job as a big-bank analyst and is inducted into the world of billion-dollar energy trades. Down at the NYMEX, our young hero quickly learns his new gig is not all that. First, he must convince the mostly Brooklyn-Italian and Jewish traders (whom Mezrich characterizes as dunderheaded, ham-fisted sons of garbage men) that, fancy degree aside, he's a gavone among gavones. Then he must sell them on the idea of opening an energy exchange in, of all

places, the Middle East . . . scarcely a year after 9/11.

Rigged's nearly true-life story is based on that of John D'Agostino, a former NYMEX trader and founding partner of Bo Collins's now-defunct energy hedge fund MotherRock. Still, given Mezrich's penchant for license-taking, the lack of promised intrigue is what's most startling here. Hampered by the presence of both a strict Muslim counter-

part and a girlfriend (who, by the way, is enough to cause Tammy Wynette to blanch), Russo's journey lacks the booze-fueled, orgiastic appeal that made Mezrich's prior entries into his signature genre such guilty pleasures. Granted, energy traders should enjoy the roman-à-clef thrill of figuring out who, in real life, is who. But most others will be trying to figure out why an excellent writer such as Mezrich doesn't move on to new terrain.



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WRITERS: ROXANNE DOWNER (READS); CRISTINA VELOCCI (\$20 GRAND WELL SPENT)