

Patrolling the neighborhoods of central Fort Worth, sorting through trash piles, exploring dumpsters, scanning the streets and the gutters for items lost or discarded, I gathered the city's degraded bounty, then returned home to sort and catalogue the take. From the Introduction In December of 2001 Jeff Ferrell quit his job as tenured professor, moved back to his hometown of Fort Worth, Texas, and, with a place to live but no real income, began an eight-month odyssey of essentially living off of the street. Empire of Scrounge tells the story of this unusual journey into the often illicit worlds of scrounging, recycling, and second-hand living. Existing as a dumpster diver and trash picker, Ferrell adopted a way of life that was both field research and free-form survival. Riding around on his scrounged BMX bicycle, Ferrell investigated the million-dollar mansions, working-class neighborhoods, middle class suburbs, industrial and commercial strips, and the large downtown area, where he found countless discarded treasures, from unopened presents and new clothes to scrap metal and even food. Richly illustrated throughout, Empire of Scrounge is both a personal journey and a larger tale about the changing values of American society. Perhaps nowhere else do the fault lines of inequality get reflected so clearly than at the curbside trash can, where one person's garbage often becomes another's bounty. Throughout this engaging narrative, full of a colorful cast of characters, from the mansion living suburbanites to the junk haulers themselves, Ferrell makes a persuasive argument about the dangers of over-consumption. With landfills overflowing, today's highly disposable culture produces more trash than ever before and yet the urge to consume seems limitless. In the end, while picking through the city's trash was often dirty and unpleasant work, unearthing other people's discards proved to be unquestionably illuminating. After all, what we throw away says more about us than what we keep.

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