

The Dream Merchant

Fred Waitzkin

Waitzkin, best known for his chess memoir, *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, offers in his first novel an elusive lead character, a born salesman whose greatest glory is never far behind his latest failure. When we meet him, Jim is an old man, broke and alienated from his friends, wives, and business partners. The sole exceptions are Mara, a young Israeli woman whose intense sexual appetites may belie a sinister self-interest, and the narrator, piecing together the story of Jim's life. But once upon a time, Jim was a king, moving from one elaborate scam to another, ruler of his own Brazilian gold empire. VERDICT The obvious comparison is to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but readers of Philip Roth's Zuckerman novels will recognize Waitzkin's approach.

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