



# **Real Food/Fake Food: Why You Don't Know What You're Eating and What You Can Do about It**

*Larry Olmsted*

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“Olmsted makes you insanely hungry and steaming mad--a must-read for anyone who cares deeply about the safety of our food and the welfare of our planet.” —Steven Raichlen, author of the Barbecue! Bible series

“The world is full of delicious, lovingly crafted foods that embody the terrain, weather, and culture of their origins. Unfortunately, it’s also full of brazen impostors. In this entertaining and important book, Olmsted helps us fall in love with the real stuff and steer clear of the fraudsters.” —Kirk Kardashian, author of *Milk Money: Cash, Cows, and the Death of the American Dairy Farm*

You've seen the headlines: Parmesan cheese made from wood pulp. Lobster rolls containing no lobster at all. Extra-virgin olive oil that isn't. So many fake foods are in our supermarkets, our restaurants, and our kitchen cabinets that it's hard to know what we're eating anymore. In *Real Food / Fake Food*, award-winning journalist Larry Olmsted convinces us why real food matters and empowers consumers to make smarter choices.

Olmsted brings readers into the unregulated food industry, revealing the shocking deception that extends from high-end foods like olive oil, wine, and Kobe beef to everyday staples such as coffee, honey, juice, and cheese. It's a massive bait and switch in which counterfeiting is rampant and in which the consumer ultimately pays the price.

But Olmsted does more than show us what foods to avoid. A bona fide gourmand, he travels to the sources of the real stuff to help us recognize what to look for, eat, and savor: genuine Parmigiano-Reggiano from Italy, fresh-caught grouper from Florida, authentic port from Portugal. Real foods that are grown, raised, produced, and prepared with care by masters of their craft. Part cautionary tale, part culinary crusade, *Real Food / Fake Food* is addictively readable, mouthwateringly enjoyable, and utterly relevant.

## Real Food/Fake Food: Why You Don't Know What You're Eating and What You Can Do about It Details

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## **From Reader Review Real Food/Fake Food: Why You Don't Know What You're Eating and What You Can Do about It for online ebook**

### **Kim Berkshire says**

Parts were really interesting, but I agree with reviewer who thought how nice for the author to be able to travel the world eating things most of us will only ever see at Whole Foods or the farmer's market (if that farmer's market is in, say, Napa). Would like to have seen more American foods put under the microscope. But the olive oil, fish and wine sections were illuminating.

But how seriously can you take a book with so many misspellings? I saw references to inexcusable mistakes in other reviews, like Columbia/Colombia and I'm sure I missed others, but come on, Pasa Robles?

I felt the publishers thought they were in some kind of race to get this book out and you can really tell by the structure of the chapters. So jarring!!!!

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### **Shomeret says**

When I decided to read Real Food/Fake Food by Larry Olmsted after seeing it on my Goodreads feed, my main concern with fake food was whether my health was being endangered by it. I learned that Larry Olmsted is what was once called a gourmet, but would now be referred to as a foodie. His main concern is authenticity. He wants food that is associated with a specific geographic location to have been made at that location in the traditional way. He explains at great length why this is important. He is not unconcerned with health, so there is some overlap. Yet I found this book only selectively valuable.

Even though not every chapter in this book dealt with types of food or beverages that I ever consume, I do consider Olmsted an engaging writer. I thought that all the content in this book was interesting. The chapters I found most significant were extremely useful and sounded an alarm about the state of our food supply. Let the buyer beware. Let the buyer also read the relevant chapter in Real Food, Fake Food.

For my complete review see <http://shomeretmasked.blogspot.com/20...>

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### **Heidi says**

Of the many "food exposé" books I've read, this is probably the least interesting. It's not because it's not well written (it's actually very well researched and the clarity of writing is excellent). Rather, it's because the food he writes about isn't the food of the masses. It's the food of the wealthy, and I guess that just doesn't pertain to my food budget.

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## **Rebecca says**

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher, via Librarything, in exchange for an honest review. I had a love/hate relationship with this book. The chapters on seafood and olive oil were terrifying. The rest of the book really irked me.

I absolutely understand the regional pride behind things like Champagne and Parmigiano Reggiano. Many people have the means to get these "real" foods from their producers overseas. Many people do not have the means to do so. This was one of my issues with the book. The author seems to be constantly traveling the world and eating in top tier restaurants. Good for him. Myself, a civil servant, will probably never have the chance to fly to Italy for cheese. According to the author, this seems to mean that I should never have "parmesan cheese" because it isn't the "real" stuff. I do think there is a major difference between the powder in the green can, and a wedge of cheese called parmesan from the specialty cheese case of my grocery store (which is NOT a Whole Foods). Simply because my \$9 wedge of parmesan is not from the right parts of Italy, it is denounced as fake and derided for daring to exist. As an educated consumer, I fully understand that the Boar's Head parmesan I'm buying is not authentic Parmigiano Reggiano. So what?

The author also isn't consistent in his real/fake cheese discussion. He bashes all American produced cheeses that originated elsewhere (feta, Muenster, etc), yet some domestic cheeses get a pass on being labeled "fake" because they are made in a common style. So who makes this decision? Why is domestic cheddar okay, when domestic feta is declared the bastard brother to Greek produced feta?

The biggest example of cheese hypocrisy is the author's declaration that American cheese food/product is simply the best cheese for burgers. Excuse me? The "food" that isn't legally allowed to be called cheese is okay by him because it is so tasty? I'll take my domestically produced "fake" cheese any day. He also advocates Popeye's fried chicken and admits to eating gas station fried chicken. How do these mass produced foods pass the "real" foods test?

And what happened to the whole Local Foods trend? Sure, you can purchase foods from all across the world because they are considered the best. But has he stopped to consider his carbon footprint? If you care about the environment, wouldn't it be better to eat domestic foods than put tons of carbon into our atmosphere to get food imported? Shouldn't we support our local farmers and producers? The high environmental cost of importing "real" foods, combined with the many, many flights the author has stated he's taken, has given him a very large carbon footprint, at least in my opinion. How can he claim that "real" foods are better for the environment?

Again, the seafood and olive oil chapters were certainly terrifying. It is obvious that our government should be doing more to prevent actual fake food from entering our markets. Products that could potentially sicken and kill consumers should be dealt with seriously, instead of not at all.

Overall the book was an informative look at food production and the global food trade, the author's attitudes and biases really turned me off. Let this book help you become a better consumer, but don't let it dictate all your food buying decisions. After all, the author confirmed that his \$125 French Bresse chicken tasted just like. . . chicken.

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## **Billie says**

This book was riddled with spelling and grammatical errors ("principal" instead of "principle" and—the one that almost made me stop reading—"Columbia" for the country of "Colombia") and presents information that should be common knowledge to most of the audience for whom this book is intended. There is a lot (*a lot*) of repetition and the most interesting parts—when the author speaks with the producers of the genuine foodstuffs and others in the food industry—are too short and often too focused on the author himself. Ultimately, this book felt like a project that arose when the author discovered the areas in which his own food knowledge was lacking and decided to write an angry screed, but an angry screed wasn't going to get him paid, so he had to tone it down and somehow turn it into a book. Save your money and use it to buy some good olive oil or a nice wedge of Parmigiano-Reggiano instead.

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## Crystal Starr Light says

Bullet Review:

Wavering between 2 and 3 stars - yes, I will be returning this on Audible!!

I've read more than a couple of these types of books, Fast Food Nation, Omnivore's Dilemma, Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, and I must say, this one was the least interesting of the bunch.

It's hard to be motivated to care about things like Kobe beef and Champagne - when the book talked about things like vine-ripened tomatoes, honey, coffee and tea, it was strongest. But the chapter-long explorations into very expensive, niche products like Kobe Beef, Champagne, Burgundy - I'll never be able to afford \$50 minimum for a bottle of Champagne, so why? And the unfortunate thing is, the book is more about the high-priced products, with a single chapter skimming over the far-more interesting products, like tomatoes, honey and coffee. (We also talk about beef and seafood in general, but it's still meh.)

This book is geared more towards your foodie - those people whose hobby is food, who travel the world to snag that rare chicken from France (WHY??!!). I didn't realize that was the demographic when I read the cover blurb and bought the book (THREE TIMES!!! Hardcover, ebook, and audiobook!); if I had, I would have let this book pass.

Full review to come - maybe.

Cover Blurb:

*You've seen the headlines: Parmesan cheese made from wood pulp. Lobster rolls containing no lobster at all. Extra-virgin olive oil that isn't. Fake foods are in our supermarkets, our restaurants, and our kitchen cabinets. Award-winning food journalist and travel writer Larry Olmsted exposes this pervasive and dangerous fraud perpetrated on unsuspecting Americans.*

*Real Food/Fake Food brings readers into the unregulated food industry, revealing that this shocking deception extends from high-end foods like olive oil, wine, and Kobe beef to everyday staples such as coffee, honey, juice, and cheese. It's a massive bait and switch where counterfeiting is rampant and where the consumer ultimately pays the price.*

This book kinda is a massive bait and switch - I mean, come on, reading the blurb, wouldn't you think you'd get a chapter on coffee, a chapter on olive oil, a chapter on juice, a chapter on wine? Split equally between

the high-end and the everyday staples? And did you expect when "cheese" is categorized under "everyday staples" it would be cheese like parmesan-reggiano and Roquefort?

Although I completely understand from the Introduction this book wasn't exactly in the vein of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, I still expected a bit more of the everyday items than I got here.

When the book focuses on things that I eat regularly - coffee, tea, tomatoes, peppers, honey, juice, tec. - the book is at its best. Sawdust in my coffee? Sticks in my tea? Green tomatoes? Honey diluted with corn syrup? All juice being apple juice (well, probably more like apple pulp flavored water...)? That stuffs interesting!

But the sad part is - all of that was wrapped up in a whirlwind final chapter. By far, most of the book is on the high-end items that I eat rarely or not at all (and never will). Don't get me wrong - I appreciate knowing Truffle Oil is a lie, Kobe beef was outlawed while still somehow appearing on menus in the US, and that lobster in that lobster roll at Red Lobster isn't lobster (ha ha), but I don't need a chapter PER ITEM on these foods I never will eat.

I get it - more Korbel's "sparkling wine" (aka California "Champagne") sells than real French Champagne (which is basically saying the same thing twice). But despite the whining in this book, I sincerely doubt the people buying Korbel's less than \$10 sparkling wine can afford a \$50+ bottle of Champagne. I know I can't. So sorry French sparkling vintners - y'all ain't losing that much money out there. I personally don't expect something less than \$10 to be the "real" thing - and I only buy local (a privilege to be sure, since I live near wine country).

Now for foodies, I'm sure this would be great information. They're the ones that make an effort, spend the money to fly all over the place and eat the local cuisine. But I'm sorry - that ain't me. And again, don't get me wrong - I appreciate knowing what's not real, so I can avoid buying it, but I doubt that's going to happen in the majority of cases talked about here because I can't afford Kobe beef, Champagne, and Burgundy on the regular.

Something else that is extremely problematic beyond the privilege of being a well-off person who can afford to indulge in these delicacies (and also the problem that these small areas could never provide enough product for all consumers) - what about your carbon footprint? Beyond the price of the product itself, we also have to factor in the cost to ship these items to the US - and that's coal and oil bringing the products to us. I don't know about you, but I do think that Climate Change is real, and I prefer to buy local to reduce my carbon footprint. In Olmstead's fervor to promote the "real thing", he completely neglects to talk about the effects of shipping these products to us in the US (or anywhere outside the small area where the product is made).

(But then the science is a bit suspicious anyway - he talks to a celebrity chef about scientific reasons to go with grass-fed beef, and the chef talks about his "research" after having a disease - which somehow I feel involves WebMD. Olmstead in that case never talked to an actual nutritional scientist about grass-fed beef and its affect on the body.)

So while there are good portions, overall I'm going to give 2-stars, just to differentiate from my other reviews on similar subjects (such as Pollen's, Kingsolver's). If you are looking for something like *Fast Food Nation*, this is not your book; if you are a foodie, then I do recommend a peek inside.

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## **Sophia says**

Highly recommended reading for anyone who truly cares about food and the food & beverage industry. As a life-long food appreciator, as someone who loves to travel, and as a person who feels strongly about shopping and eating locally, this book was exactly what I hoped it would be. Informative without being overwhelming, Olmsted marries his personal and professional experiences with research and industry-expert interviews to produce this excellent piece of journalism.

A few quick takeaways -- always buy wine, olive oil, and parmigiano-reggiano from a high-quality and experienced vendor. Never buy seafood, especially shrimp, at a restaurant. Never buy meats from a supermarket. Buy and eat everything you possibly can that is local and if you want to try a "local specialty" product, travel to the place it is made and try it there!!

And I just have to say, the last two pages were exquisitely written. Maybe that's because homemade pizza and a glass of excellent red wine is my idea of a perfect meal, but maybe not, who can say ;)

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## **Jessica says**

5 Mind-Blowing-Stars! ?????

Everyone need to read this book. Its insane finding out the truth about what we put in our mouths, thinking we are eating healthy. Worst part is, the people, & organizations like the FDA & USDA , who are supposed to be protecting us, don't. Not even half. Congress doesnt want to pass laws to monitor where our food comes from or what is in it. And even worse, some companies lie to you, pushing fake labels, pretending to be better than they are. Its disgusting.

PS: Larry, i love you. Reading this book has opened up my eyes and helped make me an even more conscious buyer and eater. Thank you.

This book will give you goosebumps, once you find out what is wrong with not only our food industry, but by what is in your kitchen. I am very health conscious, and i am very happy my bf told me to read this book, because ...wow! The lies on most food labels are outrageous! But, if you know what to look for and how to spot the fakes & scammers, you could beat them at their own game. This book helps you do just that.

“Fake Foods are usually of low quality. But they are not fake because they are of low quality; they are of low quality because they are fake”

This book is a mixture or crazy facts, recipes, stories and shopping tips to help you buy the 'real food'.

“in New England, the popular lobster roll, basically a heaping mound of lobster meat on a bun, is one of the most expensive sandwiches you can find on a menu. So how can fast-food chains sell lobster rolls for half the price or less? Simple—their lobster rolls don't contain actual lobster. And it's legal. Welcome to Fake Food.”

Fun Fact:

1. Kobe beef sold in america in any restaurant is fake! Import of Japanese beef is banned by the USDA.
2. Most cheese sold in the US is not really cheese. Cheese has 3 simple ingredients. Drug-free Milk, salt &

rennet. Kraft includes milk of unknown origin and purity, cellulose powder, potassium sorbate and cheese cultures.

3. When kraft labels say "100% Grated Parmesan Cheese", its a lie. The '100%' refers to the grating, not the cheese. And in fact, it is completely grated. F#%king WOW!

4. Kraft's "100 percent pure beef" doesn't mean there aren't any added chemicals, ingredients or flavors.

Because there are, they mean their hotdogs are made of cow. Not dog or cat or eagle. Just cow. What part of the cow? :) well that's best kept secret if you ever want to eat a hotdog again.

5. "there are no legal organic rules for seafood at all but also no rules against using the term."

6. "Here is the main way the USDA defines natural for meat: "All raw single ingredient meat and poultry qualify as natural." In one of the few cases where rules mean what they say, this defines every piece of every animal as natural. Additionally, "certain products labeled as natural may also contain a flavoring solution . . . The amount of solution added to products bearing natural claims is not limited." So while the current USDA standard for 100% grass fed does not prohibit drugs or animal by-products, and the naturally raised definition does not prohibit an unnatural diet of grain and silage, labels bearing both claims are pretty close to what consumers such as Tom Colicchio, Casey Cook, and I want to eat."

7. Bottom line: the organizations and companies that look like they are out to protect our best interests, really aren't. The laws and regulation for conventional terms on all packaging are either loose or are so completely twisted, that they don't even come close to the dictionary version. Its sickening how the people running these organizations sleep at night.

8. "If the meat you are eyeing is already packaged, as most supermarket steaks are, sandwiched between a foam tray and clear plastic wrap, don't rely on its vibrant appearance to make your decision. Meat marketers use what is known as modified atmospheric packaging, or MAP, to make products look artificially fresh. Basically, they fill the package with small amounts of carbon monoxide, the same stuff unhappy folks use to kill themselves in garages. This doesn't actually preserve meat, but it does keep it bright red—even if it has already spoiled (seafood lovers, as if you didn't already have enough problems, they do the same thing with tuna—real and fake)."

9. "While the USDA regulates the meat in the package, the carbon monoxide is considered a food additive, so it comes under the purview of the FDA, which in turn does not require it to be listed on the label." - WOW! WHAT?!

10. The USDA created a grading system for honey. Grade A, B, C, etc., but the grading rules skip vitally important factors, such as whether nonhoney ingredients (such as corn syrup) can be added. Additionally, honey and maple syrup are in a special category, and unlike almost every other product it regulates, the USDA allows use of its grading marks without any inspections, ever (oil is theoretically subject to inspection, though it almost never is). As the Federal Register reads, "Honey does not require official inspection in order to carry official USDA grade marks and . . . there are no existing programs that require the official inspection and certification of honey." Enforcement is based solely on responding to complaints" - Why create a system if no one is there to monitor it or even enforce it?!

11. "actual organic production of honey is almost impossible for producers to control, because bees roam freely and choose plants that may or may not have been organically farmed. Also, "100%" is a widely misused food label term that often means a particular ingredient, not the entire product, is 100 percent something."

12. "Increasingly, ground coffee is being mixed with cheaper ingredients such as maize, soybeans, sugar and acai seeds."

13. Regarding juice, "the sticky matter that most of the apple juice concentrate used in this country comes from China and has a bad reputation—deservedly, as it has frequently proven tainted."

14. "the bland tomato industry, which gasses the green tomatoes with ethylene, triggering a ripening response—or more accurately a reddening response—in already-picked tomatoes. "You can take green tomatoes, gas them, and they turn red within twenty-four hours, but while they may look red, they are still green, as in not ripe, and they taste terrible. Maybe 95 percent of the field grown tomatoes in the U.S. are

gassed and not truly ripe," said Dr. Howard Resh, one of the world's leading authorities on hothouse gardening and hydroponics."

15. Another fact, apples and bananas get gassed just like tomatoes to ripen.

"I've seen oil labeled 'USDA organic,' 'extra virgin,' and 'made in Italy,' which was actually colored and flavored soybean oil," Mueller told me. "If no one is checking, that's what's going to happen—you can put whatever in hell you want on the label." Guess what? No one is checking."

The beginning of Chapter 1 sucked. The made up story of a character named Paola Rainieri living in Parma was silly, nicely put. All of this to tell me how hard it is and long it takes to make Parmigiano-Reggiano. Then it talked about the correct way to make ham.

But the second half went back to interesting facts about cheese and how to spot the fakes.

"In Italy, bologna is rightly considered a delicacy, while in the United States it's almost a punishment"  
-Hahahahaaa...!

#### Shopping Tips:

1. When buying parmesan, buy the ones with the full Italian name and make sure it says "made in Italy" and has the PDO Seal.
2. For high quality balsamic vinegar, look for the full name "Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena" or "... Di reggio Emilia".
3. Never buy 'Red Snapper'. It is almost never, 98% of the time, NOT red snapper but tilapia or some other imitation fish, pumped with hormones and antibiotics.
4. Dont buy salmon from Scotland and Norway.
5. Stay away from farmed fish. Farmed salmon dont eat krill which gives them the distinctive pink color. So they are dyed with chemicals. How to tell if your eating farmed or fresh? When you cook salmon, the wild caught retains its pink color, the farmed tends to have the color leak out!!!!
6. Atlantic salmon is extinct in the wild. So they are all farmed. If it says 'wild', its a lie!
7. When buying seafood, to be safe, look for the MSC logo. It means its been wild caught. Or the Gulf Wild seal, which assures the authenticity of wild caught fish from gulf of Mexico and is best for shrimp.
8. Look for 'Alaskan Seafood' logo. Probably the most reliable for wild and natural seafood. There is no such thing as farmed Alaskan Seafood.
9. Buy dry scallops, but not really dry. So avoid scallops that are frozen, cloudy, white or translucent. Real scallops have a cream color. Treated scallops tend to be bright white.
10. "Unlike wine, olive oil is never going to be better than on the day it was bottled, but it will get worse. The most important thing you can find is the harvest date, which few bottles carry but should be no more than a year earlier. Ignore meaningless "best by" or "bottled on" dates."
11. When buying olive oil, look for the COOC or EVA or UNAPROL logos. And try to buy oils from Chili or Austria, who enforce strict no carry-over regulations.
12. When buying meat, look for the "American Grassfed Association seal". It is issued by an industry group that requires its like-minded members to feed only grass and never confine cattle or use antibiotics or hormones.
13. Remember "terms such as pasture raised, pasture finished, no additives, no animal by-products, free range, free roaming, green fed, humane, and pesticide free are all allowable—and all totally meaningless."
14. "The most reliable pork and chicken label is "USDA Organic" (used mainly for meat and much different from the FDA's version of organic), which requires a 100 percent organic diet, no antibiotics (ever), and bans feed made with synthetic pesticides."
15. "If memorizing label terms becomes a mind-numbing experience, the quickest and easiest shortcut to idiot-proof shopping for healthful red meat is to buy buffalo. At least until it gets popular enough to be

exploited, pretty much all commercial bison operations in the country are free ranging, with no fences, eating an entirely natural diet of grass and forage without drugs. It is arguably better for you than beef anyway, tastes good, and there is no such thing as a bison feedlot" (bison is buffalo meat)

16. I did not know this, but Peppers naturally go from green to red, yellow, or orange as they ripen on the vine, the same pepper, different stages. "always buy colored peppers. It's worth the extra money, better tasting, better for your health, more nutritional value."

"Japanese beef became such a wannabe foodstuff that even Burger King—yes, that second-rate fast-food chain best known for making McDonald's look good—created a \$170 wagyu burger for its UK outlets, topped with foie gras and blue cheese instead of ketchup and yellow cheese slices. Kobe beef was not available in the United Kingdom either"

"Under USDA regulations, the only legal requirement for calling something Kobe beef is that it qualifies as beef. Kobe is a completely unregulated term, and in any case, no agency—not the USDA, the FDA, or any other—regulates restaurant menu claims. Any restaurant in this country can, at any time, claim that any piece of meat it serves is Kobe beef, Kobe chicken, Kobe pork, Kobe goat, or even Kobe lobster (I've seen chicken and pork) without breaking any specific law, which as a consumer, I find sort of scary"

"Passionate, artisanal, and devoted to her ancient art, Karin Bach is also a very nice woman, and for her sake, I hope she never visits an American supermarket."

-sadly, most people who don't live in america think this about our food. Worst part is, their right. Most of american food is so packed with steroids, antibiotics, fillers, color additives, preservatives, growth hormones and much more cr\*p that you wouldn't eat if you saw it being made. So why eat it just because its in a shiny package on a store shelf?

"American cheese" (which I admittedly use regularly because it is still the best choice for cheeseburgers), isn't even cheese at all. Bearing in mind that the United States has the most lax cheese-labeling laws of pretty much any developed nation, American "cheese," with its saturated fats, emulsifiers, and other additives, ventures so far from the basic definition that it can't legally be called cheese, and when I was younger, it used to be widely known as "American cheese food." Now it is more often called "processed cheese" or "cheese product."

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### **Jane says**

So repetitive and really not very well-written or edited.

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### **Marsha says**

Larry Olmsted has an engaging and anecdotal style of writing that makes his book compulsively easy to read and it is oh so informative. I am on a quest now to find real and fresh parma-reggiano cheese and authentic and fresh olive oil. I am glad to know why ordering red snapper in a restaurant is a bad idea and why one should never ever dine in a sushi restaurant. It surprised me to read why Costco, Walmart and some of the other big-box stores are actually more reliable than restaurants and grocery stores when it comes to sourcing healthy seafood and meat.

While some of the food fraud is relatively harmless, like lobster sandwiches that contain no lobster but do still contain edible food (even seafood sometimes) there are other occasions when the substitutions have lethal consequences, like spices being extended with fillers, which can include ground peanuts and flour -- ingredients that are lethal to those allergic to them.

Much of what Olmsted relates is alarming but it's mitigated by the fact that he advises the reader on how to spot fake food and how to go about buying the real stuff. Eye opening and compulsively readable. If you eat food you need to read this book.

Thank you Netgalley and Algonquin Books for the opportunity to read a free e-edition in exchange for an honest review.

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### **GONZA says**

This book is scaring, even if it starts talking about Parma, which is one of the loveliest city I've ever lived (for 9 years) and where is possible to find the real Parmigiano Reggiano, and the real Prosciutto di Parma and so on. As an Italian person living in Europe (Berlin to be precise), I know how hard is to find the "real food", but at last it's easier compared to the difficulties and lies a U.S. citizen as to go trough. So I think it's good that this book is around, because it helps people to understand what they are eating and where to find the real stuff.

Questo libro mette paura, anche se inizia molto tranquillamente parlando di Parma, bellissima città dove sono cresciuta e dove è ancora possibile trovare il vero Parmigiano Reggiano e il prosciutto di Parma e altre fantastiche prelibatezze. Come italiana che vive a Berlino, sono perfettamente consapevole di quanto sia difficile trovare "cibo vero" all'estero, ma sicuramente è più difficile per gli americani, che si devono muovere in mezzo ad un mare di bugie e di falsi. Quindi sono contenta che esista questo libro, perché insegna alle persone quello che stanno mangiando e dove, eventualmente, trovare il corrispettivo reale.

THANKS TO NETGALLEY AND ALGONQUIN BOOKS FOR THE PREVIEW!

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### **Eric says**

If I ever wanted to lose weight, I think reading nonfiction food books is a good start. *Real Food/Fake Food* is the second book in a row generally referencing food, nutrition, health, etc. The first was *The Big Fat Surprise*. *Real Food/Fake Food* (RF/FF) is a confusing, informative and disturbing book on identifying the food I might think I am eating vs. what the food might actually be. Crazy right? It really is...

There are so many qualifiers on what real food and what the author refers to as "fake" food is confusing. **Real Food is food that is grows in nature such as fish, beef, pork, chicken, vegetables, etc. as nature intended. Real Food also are those foods crafted from natural ingredients such as cheeses, wines, oils (like olive oil) and so forth.**

**Fake Foods are edible(?) fillers, manufactured by-products, chemicals, impostors, counterfeit, deceptive-labeled, misrepresented, industrially grown meats, and genetically modified foods.**  
(FYI...there is no requirement for food companies to inform the consumer that food is genetically modified.

There is only labeling for "non-GMO" food. So, is everything else GMO?)

The definitions above are by no means inclusive. For example, the author starts off with parmesan cheese. The "cheese" you get in a cylindrical container challenges the definition of what a cheese might be. Among the list of ingredients shows "cellulose" (the author calls sawdust) and non-caking agents. This is a FAKE FOOD! This cheese in no way resembles the cheese that is made in Parma, Italy. There the cheese is made from the milk of the cows that eat the natural grasses of the region. The milk is not pasteurized. The milk of the night milking and the morning milking can be not be more than 18 hours old. The milk goes through the cheese-making where enzymes and salt are added to the cheese. That's it! The cheese goes through several quality-assurance processes to make sure the cheese is of the highest quality and is aged for 18 and 24 months. Italy regulates the cheese making to make sure it is made like has been made for the last 800 years or so.

The European Union (EU) also protects the Italian trademark of Parmesan Reggiano cheese. The U.S. sees Parmesan cheese as being "generic" and does not recognize the Italian trademark and continues label "other" cheeses as Parmesan. All other cheeses lacks the **terroir** of the real cheese because it is not made from a specific region in Italy.

Parmesan Cheese is just one example the author goes into. He goes on ad nauseum discussing Kobe beef, regular beef, olive oil, sea food, wine, coffee, teas, maple syrup and many others. Repetition starts to become to be an issue as the author revisits the same topics over again but drilling down into another detail. In the process, the same information gets discussed again.

There are number of troubling areas that bothered me. Seafood, for example, is essentially unregulated in the U.S. If you order, say Red Snapper, in a restaurant, there is 90% chance that you will not get red snapper. Olive oil...most of the olive oil sold in this country (U.S.) is not 100% olive oil. It is mixed with other oils and is of low quality often lacking in the health benefits that we think we are getting from olive oil. By the way, avoid buying olive oil in clear containers and that are not labeled "extra virgin." Anything else is probably is probably good for lubricating the door hinges. In the book, *The Big Fat Surprise*, the author says red meat has been getting a bad rap for being an unhealthy food especially in regard to heart health. In RF/FF, the cattle are feed corn, other grains, pork blood, feathers, chicken manure and other gross stuff. A cow's natural diet? Grass. Cattle as well as other meats are given hormones and antibiotics to make them grow faster and keep them from getting sick! How is that healthy?! The author recommends grass-fed beef. Some grass fed beef is given corn right before slaughter to help to produce "marbling" in the meat. Beef that is fed grass IS healthy and has a healthy balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

The book goes on and on. The author in IMO is kind of a food snob. In spite of this, the information is very thought provoking. The U.S. is behind other countries such as Canada, Australia, the EU in food standards and enforcement. Labels on food packaging is often deceptive. For example on orange juice, you may be getting orange juice plus other juices and other syrups and the label can say 100% orange juice. Consumers have to read the labels and ingredients. The shorter the list of ingredients usually the better. References like "other natural flavors" opens the door to just about anything to used as an additive. The U.S. has no standard for the use of the terms "natural" and "pure." Any packaging stating a particular product is "all natural" can mean anything. Probably not what I envision as the meaning of that term. There are simply no definitions for those terms that holds a company accountable for the product claims. This is despicable and downright deceptive labeling.

The narrator of the audio book does an excellent job in both conveying the information from the book and a bit of the cynicism in which I think the book is written.

RF/FF is a tough book to get through. I think the information is important is to consider. I can't say I agree with the author on all points. I can say though this book has opened my eyes to a lot of things that I have been taking for granted. Partly because my pantry is full of fake or counterfeit foods and because I have interest in eating healthier REAL foods. I recommend this book to those with a similar interest.

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### **Annie says**

If you know me, you know I love food politics. I love reading about it, I love thinking about it. I love thinking about the ethics of what we eat, about the victims of our consumption, about the many, many ways the FDA and food companies fail consumers, about the health consequences of those failures, and about the complete lack of transparency.

But this book isn't... quite... that. It's not a book for people interested in food politics so much as people who fancy themselves foodies.

**Structure:** The book focuses on certain foods: Parmigiano cheese, seafood, olive oil, champagne, and port are the main ones.

**Analysis:** A lot of the book is elitist and pointlessly snobby. This guy would be the most insufferable dinner guest (or dinner host for that matter). Also, I can't help but wish I could email the author with studies that show that even wine experts can't tell table wine from grand cru or even red wine from white wine that's dyed red (ditto everyone else, who are no better at telling expensive wine from cheap wine than the flip of a coin).

... So I can't help but think much of his snobbishness is probably a moot point.

However, it was not without any worth. I learned a lot of interesting things about the production of specialty high-end foods, and it was wonderful hearing of their crafters' passion for making them. I learned about calcium lactate crystals in Parmigiano Reggiano (giving it an "effervescence, like the Champagne of cheeses" according to the author, which has to be the most pretentious thing I've ever heard), and how much fake (that is, mislabeled) fish there is on the market (84 % of "white tuna" sold is actually escolar, a toxic fish that gives food poisoning symptoms and is illegal in several countries, though not the US; this is probably accounts for much of what people think is food poisoning. Another fun fact: 100% of sushi restaurants in one study had fake fish).

But all in all the author's tone is just so aggressively classist it's hard to take him seriously (he flies around the world going to *cheese conferences* for Chrissake).

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### **Ken Dowell says**

Several years ago I was vacationing in Puerto Rico and while driving along the south coast of the island, stopped at a seaside restaurant. Sitting on a dining deck overlooking the Caribbean, I ordered red snapper and thought that it was possibly the best fish fillet I'd ever tasted. I ordered red snapper again while I was in Puerto Rico and the result was the same. But when I came back to the continental U.S., every time I ordered red snapper I was disappointed. After reading Real Food, Fake Food I realize why. When you order red

snapper here, there is little chance that is what you get.

There are a couple different kinds of “fake food” covered by the author in this book. One is what I would call geographical impurity. That’s when you get Champagne or Burgundy that isn’t from those regions in France, port that isn’t from Porto, Portugal, Kobe beef that isn’t from Japan or prosciutto that isn’t from Parma. Not sure “fake” is the right word for this. Maybe just inauthentic. The other day I bought a can of “Marzano style” tomatoes that clearly said on the front of the label “grown in California.” So I was not getting real Marzano tomatoes from Italy. But I knew what I was getting and I was okay with that.

What I’m not okay with is grated Parmesan cheese cut with plastic (see Kraft), ground coffee diluted with twigs or parchment, or tea bags filled with sawdust or weeds. That is truly fake food.

A lot of what is covered in the book is about inaccurate or deceptive labeling. One classic example is Coke’s pomegranate-blueberry juice which actually contains 0.3 percent pomegranate juice. They were taken to court over this fraud and the company’s defense was that their misleading claim was in line with FDA regulations. And they were right, although in this case the judge ruled instead for common sense. But that shows how little we can rely on our regulators to help us out here. According to Olmsted, “American consumers receive less protection against Fake Foods than do citizens of Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica...”

Another example is Angus beef, which the author contends may or may not come from Angus cattle. That’s because “the USDA defines the term by color not breed. To be labeled ‘Angus,’ meat must come from a steer that was at least 51 percent black.”

Olmsted offers us some advice to make us better consumers. Some surprised me, like his assertion that if you want to be sure extra virgin olive oil is really extra virgin grade, you’re better off getting Australian olive oil than Italian. And if you want to shop somewhere that accurately identifies seafood and its origin, Walmart, Costco and BJ’s are good choices. He even slips in a recipe here and there.

I did come away with the impression that the author is a food snob who got righteously indignant over issues that I would more likely shrug off, like Parmesan cheese made in Wisconsin that was not the same as Parmigiano-Reggiano made in Parma, Italy. And little was said of the issue that you could make sure you get only prosciutto from Parma, lobster from Maine, Kobe beef from Japan and many of the other “real foods” the author discusses, but you might then have trouble paying your rent. That being said, “Real Food, Fake Food” is an enlightening account of what it is you are buying and eating, and what it is not. At one point I put the book down and went to get an apple, comfortable in the knowledge that I had picked it from the tree myself and that nobody had screwed with it or mislabeled it.

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## s says

I broke my “no pop science” rule and once again mildly regret it.

The book examines a handful of “real” foods and their fake counterparts: Parmigiano-Reggiano, Champagne, seafood, coffee, olive oil, and truffle oil are a few examples. All have a long, venerable history and exacting standards; all are widely imitated and sold as fraudulent “fake foods”.

Like most pop-science books, the writing leaves a lot to be desired. The chapters are laid out in a very predictable fashion: a product is made to exacting standards, other people try to get a quick buck by copying it. The end.

What I would like to see more of are the things that are mentioned only briefly in the conclusion: that eating “real food” (i.e., whole unprocessed foods of verified origin) is healthier and more sustainable for so many reasons. For example, there’s only the briefest mention on reducing meat consumption. I would rather read a chapter on that, than a discussion on how bad cheap beef is. (No shit! Stop eating beef!)

Parts are unbearably pretentious. (Pardon me if I don’t clutch my pearls at the thought of spending \$100s on a knock-off port.) Other parts are weirdly chauvinistic... “the original Hooter’s, a mecca for chicken wing and breast lovers”? Ugh, please.

I do think the chapters on wines (including champagne, sherry and port) are interesting. I also like that each chapter is accompanied by practical “buying tips”, like what to look for when buying a wine (region, quality designation, etc.).

It’s a pretty quick and light read, and the tips on buying “real foods” are practical/helpful. I wouldn’t get too excited about this one but it’s a decent overview of food fraud. (FWIW I’d probably give this three stars if not for the dumb machismo.)

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