



The Downhill Lie: A Hacker's Return to a Ruinous Sport

Carl Hiaasen

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Originally drawn to the game by his father, Carl Hiaasen wisely quit golfing in 1973. But some ambitions refuse to die, and as the years—and memories of shanked 7-irons faded, it dawned on Carl that there might be one thing in life he could do better in middle age than he could as a youth. So gradually he ventured back to the dreaded driving range, this time as the father of a five-year-old son—and also as a grandfather.

“What possesses a man to return in midlife to a game at which he’d never excelled in his prime, and which in fact had dealt him mostly failure, angst and exasperation? Here’s why I did it: I’m one sick bastard.” And thus we have Carl’s foray into a world of baffling titanium technology, high-priced golf gurus, bizarre infomercial gimmicks and the mind-bending phenomenon of Tiger Woods; a maddening universe of hooks and slices where Carl ultimately—and foolishly—agrees to compete in a country-club tournament against players who can actually hit the ball. “That’s the secret of the sport’s infernal seduction,” he writes. “It surrenders just enough good shots to let you talk yourself out of quitting.”

Hiaasen’s chronicle of his shaky return to this bedeviling pastime and the ensuing demolition of his self-esteem—culminating with the savage 45-hole tournament—will have you rolling with laughter. Yet the bittersweet memories of playing with his own father and the glow he feels when watching his own young son belt the ball down the fairway will also touch your heart. Forget Tiger, Phil and Ernie. If you want to understand the true lure of golf, turn to Carl Hiaasen, who offers an extraordinary audiobook for the ordinary hacker.

BONUS: This edition includes an excerpt from Carl Hiaasen's *Bad Monkey*.

The Downhill Lie: A Hacker's Return to a Ruinous Sport Details

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From Reader Review The Downhill Lie: A Hacker's Return to a Ruinous Sport for online ebook

thewestchestarian says

Short version: Hiaasen hits ball, ball doesn't go in hole, Hiaasen feels bad about himself. Repeat for 244 pages.

Long Version: The short version above represents more accurate summarization than snarky criticism. "A Downhill Lie grows out of a golf journal Hiaasen keeps during a roughly 18 month return to the activity of golf in which he details his deteriorating play, efforts to remedy it and the emotional toll it takes on him. The book lacks true literary merit – it isn't particularly funny or dramatic or moving or interesting or entertaining in any real sense. He makes some small effort at participatory journalism by partaking in a few clearly dubious stroke cutting pills, drills and products offered for sale to golfers who tend to have far more money than skepticism when it comes to improving their game. However, Hiaasen clearly brings the perspective of the believer (until the magical bracelet, pill, training club, etc. proves to be ineffective) and not the objective journalist or winking, Michael Moore-esque critic. He tries to weave in golfing memories of his deceased father but and burgeoning memories of playing with his wife and small children but these are too straightforward and perfunctory to offer much juice. He does offer some reflected celebrity glory but these are either on the level of celebrity of sportswriter Mike Lupica or stories about how he saw someone say something to Tiger Woods.

In the end Hiaasen simply spends a lot of time talking about the horrendous round of golf that day and how it made him question his fundamental worth as a human being. It seems he doesn't so much feel bad about himself because of his course performance but sees his course performance as an outward reflection of his fundamental unworthiness. Unfortunately, this self-loathing isn't severe enough to qualify as worthy of note (at one point he drowns his sorrows in Coca-cola *yawn*). In short, one wonders why the accomplished writer of fiction didn't embellish his anecdotes a bit – this is memoir after all and no one would have done a reconciliation between his private golf journal and finished book. Try reading one of his novels, maybe they are entertaining.

Criss says

Background: I'm a big time golfer, but have had insane difficulty in learning the sport and playing well.

I don't know anything about Carl Hiaasen and his previous books. What I do know is this book speaks to anyone who's had a remote difficulty with the game. So many of his stories were practically my autobiography with the sport of golf, despite my 30 years of age difference between myself and the author. I laughed out loud more times than I can remember during this book.

This book is the real Chicken Soup for the Golfer's Soul. I'm sure most golfers can relate with Carl's experiments, including buying new clubs, the latest gimmicks, reading Dr. Bob Rotella, taking many lessons... anything to find that Holy Grail of playing great golf.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who has become frustrated with golf at ANY point in time.

Tilden says

A very funny book. You can always count on Hiassen to be irreverent, sarcastic, funny, and off the wall. I didn't understand a lot of what he was talking about as I do not play golf, but I do play tennis and a lot of his struggles apply to my tennis game.

I gave the book to my tennis instructor who also plays golf. He started telling me some of his own golf adventures.

Michael says

Carl Hiassen is a very funny guy. If you don't believe me, just check out any of his absurdly funny novels.

Turning his eye to the non-fiction realm, Hiassen looks at his taking up the game of golf again after a 32-year break. Hiassen's look at how the game can grow into an obsession is wonderfully witty, wryly observed and self-deprecating. The great part is that Hiassen doesn't take himself too seriously, allowing the reader to experience the highs and lows of trying to play the game of golf.

The Captain says

Ahoy there me mateys! So I discovered this author due a cat on the cover. That book was scat and I loved it. It was cute and funny. When I went to look at what else he had written, I came across his non-fiction about golf. Now to be fair, I know absolutely nothing about golf other than miniature golf. Which people claim is hardly the same thing. The book's subtitle be "a hacker's return to a ruinous sport." That and the blurb made me interested. So I listened to the audiobook.

What a found was an silly adventure into one man's relationship with the sport. For all Mr. Hiassen's claim to dislike the game, only someone who loved it could subject himself to such humiliation on the course time and time again. I absolutely loved reading about the ridiculous lengths that people (mostly men) go to in order to improve their game. From arguments about how many dimples should be on a golf ball, to the different types of clubs, to stroke cutting pills, it be amazing what people spend money on. I also though the sections on how wildlife in Florida has moved to the golf courses due to loss of habitat were interesting. Mr. Hiassen's reflections on this and the wildlife he sees on the green were wonderful. And at times very very funny.

The book does go into a lot of detail about specific rounds of golf. The author kept a golf diary of every stroke. This took up most of the second half of the book and since I have no idea how golf is scored, it did get repetitive and boring in parts. But I did enjoy reading about the golfing misadventures and a topic about which I knew nothing. I do now know that I will stick with putt-putt. Arrr!

Check out me other reviews at <https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress.com>

Rufus says

I have never read anything of Carl Hiaasen, but always wanted to. Since I am very interested in Golf (but don't play yet) and stumbled on this, it became my first read of his work.

I think its great. I can't compare it to his other works yet, but on its own its pretty funny. I love jargon laced descriptions of sporting events (Grishams "Bleachers" comes to mind here), so his accounts of his games and the tournament were great.

Even better were the times he either remembered something about his father and his relationship to him or when he saw his own son play golf.

Overall an excellent read.

Mike French says

Watch out Dan Jenkins! This could be the most humorous golf book since Dead Solid Perfect, If you play golf and like humor, this bood is a must read!

Gill says

The Downhill Lie

Will He Ever Feel Good About Golf?

One of the hardest things about golf is quitting for 30 years, than playing well when you're 50. This is exactly what Carl Hiaasen did. We will follow his journey returning to golf, and let's see what happens.

The Downhill Lie by Carl Hiaasen is a great memoir about this fantastic author's golf life. In 2007, Carl Hiaasen's journey with the game started in Florida. Mike Lupica, David Feherety, and Mark Leibo help Carl with his golf outings. I give this book 4 out of 5 stars. It was hilarious, but I wouldn't recommend it to non-golfers because they might not get all of the concepts of golf, and they wouldn't understand that Carl wants to master the game of golf, they wouldn't see that it is very hard to master golf, and that's why Carl is working so hard.

Carl Hiaasen thinks he is bad at golf because he hits a lot of shanks, he doesn't have the right putter, and because his age is getting to his right knee.

Carl Hiaasen hits so many shanks, that he banishes the word from his vocabulary. Carl Hiaasen writes "the sh___ have set in so stubbornly" (173). Leibo says "you can sh___ it all day long and I don't care, as long as you give me two pars" (173).

Carl Hiaasen doesn't have a consistent putter. This is another reason why he thinks he sucks at golf. Carl Hiaasen says, "I'm not good enough for you" as he puts the Cameron putter that had been a gift from his wife into his locker. Carl Hiaasen gets a new putter called the "Rossa," which apparently forgives mis-hits (all on page 159). It works for a couple of rounds before it also fails Carl. I think the putters aren't failing Carl, I think Carl just doesn't want to blame himself for his putting mis-fortunes.

Carl doesn't use this excuse much but a pro teacher says he shanks because his knee hurts. Steve Archer says the accursed sh___ is the result of sliding rather than pivoting away from the ball. He theorizes that Carl is doing this because the pain in his right knee makes it uncomfortable to rotate the hips (180). Carl Hiaasen

thinks he is bad at golf because he hits a lot of shanks, he doesn't have the right putter, and because his age is getting to his right knee. Carl Hiaasen gets frustrated when playing golf. So do I. Carl also does some klutzy things, like drowning a golf cart. Sometimes I'm a klutz too. One time I hugged somebody that I thought was my dad, but it wasn't my dad. I guess that doesn't compare to drowning a golf cart, but it was one of my many mistakes. Even though Carl has had some trouble on the golf course, he should know that it's important to stick with it-not just in golf, but never give up in life.

I worked very hard on this assignment and I really was into this book, so the book review went pretty fast especially since I just added onto my last book review. It was easy to find quotes for the three reasons. It was hard to add quotes to my story because I finished reading the book a while ago. But it was easy to add onto the paragraphs by just adding my thoughts to the paper.

Kazen says

My second golf book in a month. I'm not a fan of the sport but after the horrible Tales from Q School it deserved a second chance.

Hiaasen decided to get back into golf after decades away and spent a year and a half, a sizable chunk of change, and many hours of frustration trying to get his stroke back. I knew I'd like him from the first line of the preface: "There are so many people to blame for this book that it's hard to know where to begin."

What makes this memoir better than the Q School slog is that Hiaasen actually has a life and gets away from the action now and then. There are stories about his dad (a golfer himself, who died suddenly many years ago), how courses have become a refuge for wildlife in highly developed Florida, and fly fishing. All relate back to golf in one way or another and allow a breather from the action.

While plodding at times (especially during the last tourney) the book was easy enough for this non-golfer to follow and enjoy.

Jonathan says

As much respect and admiration as I have for my fellow Floridian, I have to say this book does seem like an afterthought. Many of the other criticisms are valid. It appears someone had the bright idea to take this gentleman's journal and publish it. Having said that, I read the book quite rapidly and enjoyed it immensely. I have the creeping suspicion I'm a very specific target audience. 1) I recently began golfing again after nearly 20 years of retirement following a lackluster career on my high school golf team. 2) I'm semi-fluent in golf speak, a language that would leave someone who has never been in the loop scratching their heads 20 pages in. 3) I've been a huge fan of the author since I was a kid when he described my home town in vivid and epic detail in a few of his books. 4) this factoid is perhaps most important...I borrowed the book and spent not one penny on it.

Hiaassen's wit and witticism remains firmly intact, but unless you meet some or all of the above criteria, then chances are slim you'd find much to latch onto in this rapid fire golf journal. At times it seems much like the internal dialogue of a middle aged man trying to find meaning and the latest void filler is the sport of golf. Had my mother never handed me a secondhand copy of "Tourist Season" all those years ago, I might have never known what a gifted writer this man is. This book certainly doesn't go far to support that statement, nor

would it inspire a first-timer to investigate that thesis any further. You will either plow through this book in no time or become completely dumbfounded and abandon it. I don't suspect many opinions will fall in-between.

Stephenphillips19 says

If you are looking for a funny read to fill your spare time, this book will do the trick. There is not any kind of major plot to this book, other than to make you laugh...a lot. I found myself laughing almost every page of the book. It is a quick read, so if you don't feel like you have accomplished anything after reading it, at least you didn't waste too much time on it. If you want to understand this book you will need at least a beginner's knowledge of golf, and a love for the sport. If you don't have at least one of those you will find yourself putting this back on the shelf in the first 10 pages.

H. Hall says

I often read fairly frivolous books...just for pleasure...and sometimes those books offer more than simple pleasures. Carl Hiassen, one of the most insanely funny and intensely ecological writers we have, often give me more than simple pleasures in his novels.

It is unfortunate, then, to see him turn his immense talents into a book as poorly crafted and humorless as is *The Downhill Lie*. The only value I can see in this book might be to pad Mr. Hiassen's wallet. There are enough people who will buy almost anything he writes to do that. Perhaps he had a deadline and could think of nothing to write...and that's pretty much what he has written.

If you want to read humor on golf courses, try almost any of Texas (not Florida) writer Dan Jenkins's novels set on those over-watered green fairways. His most recent, *The Franchise Babe*, is far from his best, but stands head and shoulders above this lousy memoir of a bad golfer by Hiassen.

If you want serious nonfiction that is well-written and insightful, try any of John Feinstein's excursions onto great golf courses. But don't waste your money on Hiassen's latest lack of effort. Wait, instead, for his next novel.

Robert says

Although the writing in *The Downhill Lie* is punchy, often funny, and vivid, there really are only two reasons to read it: A) if you love or hate golf, and B) if you are a fan of Carl Hiassen's novels. This is a memoir of a middle-aged man returning to a frustrating game and achieving, yet again, true mediocrity. The setting, in my opinion, is the worst of golf. Hiassen has become wealthy enough to become a country club golfer, a golf tourist, and a consumer of golf equipment and lessons. In other words, he has entered the socio-economic stratum that separates golf from most of the world, leaving his earlier exposure to the game on municipal courses largely behind.

The real reason Hiassen played golf in the first place was to spend time with his father out on the course. That's one of, again, two reasons to love golf: A) many of us, myself included, fell under its spell because we were out there on the course with dad; dad was teaching us things and listening to us; dad was all ours; B) golf is a unique blend of nature and geometry, both beautiful realities; as John Updike even more memorably

wrote about golf, the point is to draw lines across the universe with a white ball instead of a pen or pencil; that gives you, on occasion, a godly feeling.

To Hiaasen's credit, he understands both these things about golf, or at least he remembers them. He makes much of his anxieties and frustrations about being no good, but he is happy to play by himself. Golfers who enjoy the game most for its social aspects conform to a lot of its upper class snootiness and exclusivity.

Golfers who play by themselves are in touch with their dead fathers and the compelling worlds of physical and metaphysical reality; in other words, they are engaging in rites that are both religious and artistic.

I'm serious about this. I guess you can tell this. Tiger Woods, about whom Hiaasen writes, clearly drives himself and his golf balls for these two reasons: to stay close to the father who taught him golf and to struggle with the mind and matter. He could care less about social status. He's a loner in a group game. Yes, he's rich and famous, but his yacht is called Privacy; he wants to get away from the world except in terms of father/son relations and cosmic engagement.

Of course, anyone who wants can flip this scenario and make it a story focused on women feeling the same way about golf. I am making it a man's story because Hiaasen is a man, and so am I. Gender, in fact, has little to do with it.

The story-line here is that Hiaasen wants to prepare for a club championship and acquit himself well. Naturally, he flops at that. This is funny to an extent but rather familiar to most golfers and probably bewildering to most non-golfers. Non-golfers cannot be persuaded by anyone that miserable failure is worthwhile. They also do not understand that on a golf course you might see an eagle or a fox or a deer or fascinating banks of clouds.

Again, the wealthier you become, the worse golf becomes. First, you have the money to rent golf carts, or even own them. That ruins the tempo and engagement of the game. Second, you play in a context of peer competitors who do not love you wildly. Third, you eat and drink too well before, during the turn after the ninth hole, and at what is called the 19th hole, which is the country club bar and grill where you and your buddies laugh at one another and talk about equipment or lessons you lust after.

True golf, in my experience, is going to a public course, playing alone or with strangers, and meditating. At times even a crappy golfer like Hiaasen can hit a ball as well as anyone in the world. He could never hit a major league pitcher's fast ball, but a golf ball just sits there and luck intervenes in your favor. Off goes a shot that is lovely to watch and remember. Tiger Woods couldn't hit it better (but at least he knows how he did it).

The book wisely ends with Hiaasen falling in deeper love with his son, teaching him golf, or simply finding his way into the game or into his dad's love. Hiaasen is a kind of skipping stone as a writer so he doesn't go deep into the meaning of love, but his instincts are good. He knows that his deteriorated state as a middle-aged man is not significant. It happens to all of us unless we die young. What's important about golf are those eagles and foxes and soaring shots and memories of having your father's eyes fixed on you as though you were the center of the universe, which is what a young boy or girl really is.

Toddevans says

Hiaasen is a fav of mine, and I like his kids books and adult books as well. He's a gifted storyteller.

As a hacker in his teens, he had given up golf until mid-life. This book is a diary of his efforts to exceed his best teen score, having wondered what it would be like to play the game again.

It's a fast read, and anyone who has ever attempted to play the game will chuckle and smile with each turn of the page.

I'm sending my copy to my brother first (a good golfer) with a note that he send it to my father-in-law (a "serious" duffer) when he finishes it.

John Laliberte says

For the guy who doesn't golf much, tends to experience slicing, topping the ball, sand traps, putts that are too short (or too long) and smacking the chip shot a mile (when you are trying to loft it close softly to the pin), this book is a must read. Funny one-liners. Hiaasen captured the emotional whirlwind that only golf seems to provide - the highs and lows.

I enjoyed it... and it will help me to keep the game in perspective... ok - done, now I'm going to play a quick 9 holes....

Thanks Kate for a great Father's Day's gift....
