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Reality programming--a broad title for unscripted shows that involve non-actors--is really an updated version of a classic television genre that had its first successes decades before *The Real World* or *Survivor* made their premieres. NBC launched *Try and Do It*, a show in which audience members attempted to complete tasks such as whistling with a mouthful of crackers, in 1949. In the 1950s *Queen for a Day* crowned the most down-trodden of its four contestants at the end of each show, draping her in a sable-trimmed robe and granting a previously declared wish. The wild success reality television has achieved of late has pushed the envelope of such programming ever further away--from the genre's innocuous beginnings. The time is now ripe for a look back on how this genre has developed, what it reveals about us, and what has transformed it into one of the most powerful forms of entertainment on television today. Using interviews with network insiders, reality producers, and other experts, Richard Huff supplies fascinating insights into the diverse content and often erratic development of reality television programming, augmenting this information with illuminating general connections between the past and present forms these shows assume. From *Queen for a Day* through *Extreme Makeover*, from *Cops* to *Fear Factor*, the genre is placed before us in this exhaustive and many-sided account, an account that uncovers the foundations and the future potential of the compelling and dominating phenomenon that is reality television.