



# Dead Men Do Tell Tales: The Strange and Fascinating Cases of a Forensic Anthropologist

By William R. Maples, Michael Browning

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From a skeleton, a skull, a mere fragment of burnt thighbone, prominent forensic anthropologist Dr. William Maples can deduce the age, gender, and ethnicity of a murder victim, the manner in which the person was dispatched, and, ultimately, the identity of the killer. In *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*, Dr. Maples revisits his strangest, most interesting, and most horrific investigations, from the baffling cases of conquistador Francisco Pizarro and Vietnam MIAs to the mysterious deaths of President Zachary Taylor and the family of Czar Nicholas II.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Noted forensic anthropologist Maples, whose specialty is the study of bones, and freelance journalist Browning here recount Maples's criminal and anthropological investigations over the past 20 years. The meandering text combines episodes from Maples's personal life and education with discourses on his philosophy, his teaching at the Univ. of Florida and his work. The book's strength is as a snapshot of the world of forensic scientists, vividly portraying the siege mentality of many of them when their objective data are used for purposes other than ascertaining the truth about how a victim died. Despite the two-dimensional depiction of the people who were the objects of Maples's investigations-including the "likely" remains of Romanov Tsar Nicholas II-his memoirs should hold readers' interest.

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From [Booklist](#)

Maples' first exposure to his career came as a freshman in college when a class he wanted was full and his adviser then suggested he take the survey course on anthropology. Maples was fortunate, as will be any reader with a strong stomach who picks up his book. He tells how he learned to look at mangled bodies and continues to explain how he learned to both see and observe and how he discovered such fruitful techniques as tasting bone samples. Although it tends to be lifeless, forensic anthropology is not a cut-and-dried subject; nevertheless, Maples narrates his cases clearly and engagingly. He describes the remains (or, when burnt, cremains) presented to him, describes what he looks for, and guides us through his thinking and the search for additional clues and information. His most difficult, fascinating, and perplexing case dealt with a 1985 apparent double murder and burning, while among historic bodies, Maples dealt with those of Francisco Pizarro, Zachary Taylor, Czar Nicholas II, and Joseph Merrick, "the Elephant Man." *William Beatty*

Review

"When he's not shattering myths about maggots, Dr. Maples is delightfully unraveling true murder mysteries, ancient and modern. He's not just another clever forensic detective -- he's a poet, a philosopher, and a sly commentator on the fractured human condition, pre-and post-mortem."

-- Carl Hiaasen, author of *Strip Tease* and *Native Tongue*

"Whether Maples' subjects are famous or anonymous, it is how he tells their stories that makes this book so fascinating and -- in its fashion -- delightful."

--Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Post Book World*

"William R. Maples and Michael Browning could've written a dry clinical analysis of forensic anthropology; instead they tell tales better than the dead could for themselves."

-- *New York Times Book Review*

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