



Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers

By Mary Roach

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"One of the funniest and most unusual books of the year....Gross, educational, and unexpectedly sidesplitting."—*Entertainment Weekly*

Stiff is an oddly compelling, often hilarious exploration of the strange lives of our bodies postmortem. For two thousand years, cadavers—some willingly, some unwittingly—have been involved in science's boldest strides and weirdest undertakings. In this fascinating account, Mary Roach visits the good deeds of cadavers over the centuries and tells the engrossing story of our bodies when we are no longer with them.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Uproariously funny" doesn't seem a likely description for a book on cadavers. However, Roach, a Salon and Reader's Digest columnist, has done the nearly impossible and written a book as informative and respectful as it is irreverent and witty. From her opening lines ("The way I see it, being dead is not terribly far off from being on a cruise ship. Most of your time is spent lying on your back"), it is clear that she's taking a unique approach to issues surrounding death. Roach delves into the many productive uses to which cadavers have been put, from medical experimentation to applications in transportation safety research (in a chapter archly called "Dead Man Driving") to work by forensic scientists quantifying rates of decay under a wide array of bizarre circumstances. There are also chapters on cannibalism, including an aside on dumplings allegedly filled with human remains from a Chinese crematorium, methods of disposal (burial, cremation, composting) and "beating-heart" cadavers used in organ transplants. Roach has a fabulous eye and a wonderful voice as she describes such macabre situations as a plastic surgery seminar with doctors practicing face-lifts on decapitated human heads and her trip to China in search of the cannibalistic dumpling makers. Even Roach's digressions and footnotes are captivating, helping to make the book impossible to put down.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Those curious or brave enough to find out what really happens to a body that is donated to the scientific community can do so with this book. Dissection in medical anatomy classes is about the least bizarre of the purposes that science has devised. Mostly dealing with such contemporary uses such as stand-ins for crash-test dummies, Roach also pulls together considerable historical and background information. Bodies are divided into types, including "beating-heart" cadavers for organ transplants, and individual parts-leg and foot segments, for example, are used to test footwear for the effects of exploding land mines. Just as the nonemotional, fact-by-fact descriptions may be getting to be a bit too much, Roach swings into macabre humor. In some cases, it is needed to restore perspective or aid in understanding both what the procedures are accomplishing and what it is hoped will be learned. In all cases, the comic relief welcomes readers back to the world of the living. For those who are interested in the fields of medicine or forensics and are aware of some of the procedures, this book makes excellent reading.

Pam Johnson, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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From Library Journal

Not grisly but inspiring, this work considers the many valuable scientific uses of the body after death. Drawn from the author's popular Salon column.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Barbara Fontenot:

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