



Aftermath, Inc.: Cleaning Up After CSI Goes Home

Gil Reavill

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A crime writer who thought he could handle anything confronts the worst of everything. Violent and unattended deaths...suicide...forensics...viral pathology...crime scene myths...The stories behind Aftermath, Inc. are stranger than fiction, and utterly human and compelling.

Like most people, true-crime writer Gil Reavill had never actually experienced a fresh crime scene. That is, until he met Tim Reifsteck and Chris Wilson, owners of Aftermath, Inc., a company in the new field of "bioremediation." In the mid-80s, when a sea change occurred in the way biohazard clean-up was handled, no one in traditional cleaning or janitorial services would come within ten feet of a blood-spattered crime scene. Into this void stepped lifelong friends Tim and Chris, who filled a desperate need by founding their company. For the guys of Aftermath, no crime scene is too bloody to clean.

Aftermath, Inc. traces their history, introducing their clients and employees, and the cops, coroners, and detectives they encounter in their work. Gil goes on scene and works side by side with the Aftermath technicians. He tells the stories that led up to some of Aftermath's most grisly clean-up jobs, taking us on a journey through the suburban Midwest where the company is based, home to some of the quietest, calmest, most ordinary blocks in the world, which hide much darker undercurrents beneath.

The issues that the Aftermath crew members face on a daily basis range from the mundane (What's the best way to suppress the urge to regurgitate?) to the lofty (How does being exposed to death on a daily basis alter one's personal philosophy?). Reavill approaches his task with respect and compassion, taking as his mantra a line from the Roman poet Terence-- "Nothing human is foreign to me."

Aftermath, Inc.: Cleaning Up After CSI Goes Home Details

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From Reader Review Aftermath, Inc.: Cleaning Up After CSI Goes Home for online ebook

Tammy Walton Grant says

I have always been a somewhat morbid sort, so you can see why this book appealed to me immensely.

It's an easy read, with tons of gnarly detail and incisive wit. I laughed out loud a number of times while reading, mostly from passages like this, where the author is referring to the death of a kid on his little league team when he was seven:

"You always remember your first dead body. The following afternoon at the funeral home, Chucky was a waxen figure arrayed in a coffin of polished mahogany, somehow more elegant in death than he had been in life, at least on the baseball diamond, where his fielding skills left something to be desired. W.C. Fields used to call death "the Fellow in the Bright Nightgown." For me, he was always a Little League Shortstop."

Call me cracked, but that paragraph made me burst out laughing. My husband was appalled. :)

While this particular book became an essay by the author about the meaning of life and death, it was entertaining in its way and I learned a ton of interesting tidbits that I can use socially (like that Dylan's song, Mr. Tambourine Man, was written after a trip to New Orleans where he watched a number of jazz funerals - the hearse was led by a man tapping a tambourine. Who knew that song was so morbid?).

Ultimately, though, I finished this quickly and was vaguely disappointed at the end. I was looking for a deeper look at the business itself and the people who do this for a living. Other reviews have recommended Mop Men: Inside the World of Crime Scene Cleaners, so perhaps I'll check that book out as well.

If you're looking for a bit of an eyeball at the business, a few disgusting, a few disturbing and a couple of downright disquieting crime scene stories you'll find them here.

3 stars.

Melissa says

Finally, a nonfiction book I enjoyed! It is gory, and graphic, and gruesome. But it's also fascinating. Never have I ever thought about the need for cleanup after violent or unattended deaths. But who else would take care of it? Very interesting and very readable - just not while eating! Cons: the constant use of metaphors and analogies were bad. For example, someone's melting skin was compared to the Wicked Witch of the West??? Just say it melted. Also, there were lots of words (scientific or technical or just "big") that I wish I was reading the eBook version for quick definitions. I ended up just skipping over lots of words.

Kristi says

I found the author's jock/Maxim style extremely grating, and his liberal use of quotes to be downright annoying, but the book eventually won me over. At times it seemed like a thinly veiled advertisement for Aftermath, Inc., but there was just enough substance to keep things interesting. I was more interested in the science and methodology of crime scene clean-up, while the book focused more on the human aspect. Not a bad thing, just not quite what I expected.

Melissa says

A book about the people who clean up after forensics. These people go in and do their job of cleaning up blood, body parts, and body fluids. You will not hear a lot about them in crime shows or in books. I really wanted to like this book and it was a decent read. The author really enjoyed rambling and adding quotes here and there. It appears he tried to lighten up the subject but his humor falls a bit flat. I disliked how judgemental he seemed to people especially the victims and the dead. He talks about a case of a family massacre and in a few pages we learned what he thought. First the house theme was brummagem as he says it describes cheap and showy ornaments then makes a point to tell the chandelier was not crystal. He then tells you the daughter was heavyset which was pointless to add. So what if she was heavyset she was brutally murdered in her home. The author tries really hard to mix his fiction skills with writing non-fiction so parts read like a crime novel with overused descriptive words and the rest is him trying to be serious and explain things though you can tell he barely understands them himself and just tries. This would be an interesting subject to learn more about. Hopefully by an author who will do the subject justice.

Jodi Blackman says

A harrowing and frank look at a specialty industry: biohazard removal in the aftermath of death. Whether through murder, suicide or natural causes, the mess death leaves is far from pretty, and very few of us experience it first hand.

Crime writer Gil Reavill tags along with the crew of a specialist company that restores order and safety to places that were chaotically and grimly soiled. The book is well researched and the stories in it well handled. It is at times gross, gory, ghastly, and horrifying as well as unbearably sad. It was hard to push through some parts - especially the section on suicide, having lost a family member to it just last year.

Some of the details of the deaths in this book will stay with me for a long, long while; some have already been fictionalized through popular culture in films like The Silence of the Lambs.

Overall it is a good read - very compelling provided you don't have a delicate constitution.

Joshua Polk says

Very gross. Very enjoyable. The author tends to get off track quite a bit, but it is a quick, interesting read.

Dustin says

This was an interesting look at a subject no one ever really thinks about. But it was definitely educational. Some sections do not deal with clean up at all, though, and focus on the motives behind crimes, the criminal mind, or just out right philosophical musing about life and death. It all ties together, given the subject matter. But I felt it a little too far off base at times. You pick this up expecting gruesome details (which are present, don't get me wrong) about cleaning up crime scenes. I really wasn't interested in anything else. The book is still worth reading. For me, it would have been better if it focused more on the clean ups, and less on philosophy.

Miles says

Ewwww. Ick. Gross. All that and more. This is a book about the people who clean up when grandpa is found decomposing in the hallway three weeks after he died in the house where he lived alone. This is the story of people who scrape the brains off the wall after junior blows his head off with a shotgun. This is the tale of the maggots and bugs and vomit inducing stench of decomposition. You think you've got stain removal challenges? You don't have stain removal challenges. Bioremediation technicians have stain removal challenges. And after they solve them they spend a long time in the shower before they go home to their families. This book tells their stories.

My spouse checked this book out for my son, almost 15, who likes CSI shows. I think on balance I'm glad he wasn't interested in it. We sometimes speak of the awfulness of death as an abstract matter, of nothingness and loss. This is the other awfulness of death, the more visceral sense, the horror of the dissolution of the human body in the summer heat and in turbine engines and at the end of a gun. This is about the noise that the maggots make and the chemistry of decomposition, about the HazMat suits and the problem of waste disposal.

The book itself reaches for more philosophical weight than the author seems capable of sustaining. His ruminations about death and life and the reasons for his own fascination with his subject are disorganized and rambling. His attempt to go beyond the clean-up problem and play forensic investigator on some of the crime scenes he encounters falls flat. But there was enough gruesome detail about the experiences of the employees of Aftermath Inc. to keep me turning the pages.

Now I can add "bioremediation technician" to the list of jobs I'm glad I never had, and never will have.

RNOCEAN says

In this grisly, swaggering tale of gut-churning crime scenes and the men who clean them up after the forensics team is done, veteran true crime scribe Reavill (*Beyond All Reason: My Life with Susan Smith*) holds nothing back. From descriptions of crimes ("The fusillade of bullets tore through Johnson's body.... Blood, bits of flesh and bone fragments exploded everywhere") to hepatitis C "bleed-outs" ("All four walls of the bathroom looked like someone had taken a blood hose and turned it on them"), Reavill grabs the reader by the throat and doesn't let go. He follows the techs from Aftermath, Inc.—a bioremediation outfit in

suburban Chicago—as they make the rounds of shotgun suicides, multiple murders and meth lab cleanups; dealing not only with the gross-out of the work but trying to stay sane doing it. While some black humor seeps in around the edges, Reavill mostly depicts a cadre of low-key, hardworking men doing a horrible job with respect and compassion. The narrative pace flags a bit in the last 50 pages when Reavill tries to connect Aftermath's work with larger moral issues, but otherwise, if anything can get CSI watchers to flip off the tube and pick up a book, this is it.

***Rate this 3/5. An interesting book on an occupation that I have always wondered about. I wondered what type of people do the job, what they charge (\$250/hr) and how they do it. This is not a book for people with a queasy stomach as it is very descriptive, but it was worth the read. Sometimes, you have to just read this type of book, ya know!

Natalie says

Better by far than Mop Men (see last review), and with plenty of interesting details. Neal Smither, the subject of Mop Men, is a far more interesting character than the guys profiled in Aftermath, but this is the better book.

Renee says

Aftermath, Inc.: Cleaning Up After CSI Goes Home, by Gil Reavill, is not for the faint of heart or the weak-stomached. Reavill, who is a crime story writer for *Maxim*, decided to do a story about a real-life company who does “bioremediation”; that is, clean-up and removal of the biological mess of violent crimes, suicides, long-unnoticed natural deaths. High Ick Factor but the story is told with humor, respect for those who do this work, and a good dose of self-deprecation (Reavill has a very weak stomach). Although the author strays a bit in his narrative at times, he tells an engrossing (heh) and edifying tale.

Joanne Parkington says

This book was right up my street so a 3 star rating was pretty much in the bag already ... in Britain the thankless task of cleaning up crime scenes belong's to the local council's fumigation & pest control team's but there's no such cover in America step forward bioremediation companies and in particular Aftermath Inc., ... Gil Reavill shadow's the 'techs' of the title at first like a giddy kid until the unpleasentness of the task's ahead start to sink in ... never mind the smell's.

The author has an easy, free flowing style of writing & his persona leap's off the page albeit a geeky one at time's ... two thing's grate.. Firstly, his needy persistence of using overly long, descriptive word's which render his sentences too flowery & secondly, his apparent hard-on for the CSI character Gill Grissom who is mentioned in nearly every chapter. Putting those aside this book is crammed full of interesting 'i didnt know that' trivia ... dripping with blood, gut's & gore and bursting with insider gossip & information. It's packed with the unfortunate true stories of sad,untimely death's & details of the fellow "human's" that caused them. Be warned that some of these stories are particulary gory ... i wish i hadn't read the Robin Gecht chapter at night as i didn't sleep a wink disturbing stuff.

If i lived in Chicago i'd move.

Kye Alfred Hillig says

Having done this job I was ready to be very critical of it especially because the author wrote for Maxim which I think it a magazine that plays to the lowest common denominator. This book was incredibly true to life. I related to his nervousness riding out to his first job. It really rang bells with me about some of his revelations doing this line of work. It truly does make you realize that we are not our bodies. It also is true that once you have done this job that you never look at life or death the same way ever again. Many times as I walk through my daily life I will see something not unlike Mr.Reaviell does afterwards and see something simple like a coffee can and it will send you back to a gruesome scene. The only thing in this book that I thought was bullshit was totally out of the hands of the author. The problem I had was with some of the people who were working with Gil. They seemed to bastardize the trade by attempting to seem cool and taking every opportunity to drop mtv friendly one-liners. I guess that's what you would get working a job like that with a bunch of dumb jocks who use Axe body spray. Gil's writing kept me flipping the pages to see what was next even with my knowledge of the trade. Well done.

Tracey says

My semi-morbid streak (along with a friend's recommendation) led me to check this book out from my local library. Reavill is a true-crime writer who decided he should go one step further and learn about what happens to a crime scene once the law is done with it. Therefore, he meets the owners of Aftermath Inc., the heavy-hitters in the field of "bioremediation" - providing cleaning services to bio-contaminated sites; usually death scenes, but not always.

Reavill jumps in with both Tyvek-clad feet, joining the technicians on several jobs - including a three-week decomp and a shotgun suicide. Taking as his mantra a line from the Roman poet Terence-- "Nothing human is foreign to me.", he fights not only nausea and revulsion, but the temptation to dehumanize the situation. Instead, Reavill finds himself drawn to the signs of the life the person led beforehand.

Reavill does detour a bit at times, discussing his personal encounters with accidental and violent death, as well as focusing in on the bloody history of Chicago (Aftermath Inc. is headquartered in a suburb of the city), including the slaughterhouses, H.H. Holmes and the Mob. The book is a mix of factual situations and personal reflection; much like Mary Roach's *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, tho with considerably less humor.

Recommended to fans of CSI and Hoarders who want to see the real-life repercussions of the storylines from the shows. Suggested fiction followup: *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death* by Charlie Huston.

Caleb Ross says

Not exactly a review, but I do mention this book in one of my book vlog videos. Click the image below to watch (opens in YouTube).

Truly a fantastic and fascinating look into the cleaning of crime scenes. Though this book does do a great job at outlining the specifics (types of materials used, and such) it really shines by going into the lives of the survivors and of the cleaners themselves.
