



Never Suck A Dead Man's Hand: Curious Adventures of a CSI

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This is a unique personal perspective on forensic science, written in a darkly humorous voice by an expert who worked as a crime scene investigator for over 10 years.

Never Suck A Dead Man's Hand: Curious Adventures of a CSI Details

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From Reader Review Never Suck A Dead Man's Hand: Curious Adventures of a CSI for online ebook

Rose says

The author of this is deeply annoying, but I read it to the end anyway.

A few things that grated:

1. I don't think you should publish, even anonymously, photos of corpses to take the piss out of, especially not one where I'm pretty sure that if you showed it to the family they would recognise the man pictured. This particular photo is captioned: "This is exactly why you should always put sheets on your bed. After a long night of drinking, this guy decided he'd forgo the bed linens and now look at him.... He's going to be known in heaven as "you know - the guy with the mattress pattern on his back"."
2. Lots of random photos that didn't pertain much to anything.
3. Spelling/grammatical mistakes, including lots of confused homophones, and getting "former" and "latter" the wrong way round.
4. Her insistence on giving everything in 10 codes, then translating in brackets. It's one thing in direct speech, but it's another when you're just reporting something.
5. Her smugness at lots of "hilarious" incidents like playing pranks on people (including one where she adopts "a thick English accent" - what, like Brummie?), trying to fly with a carry-on bag of skulls and no documentation or papers then acting all 'what the hell?' when they dare to question her about it even though she's late for her flight, and calling up a funeral home to ask for coffins for the 16 dead people she has in her garage (bones that need to be re-interred) while refusing to explain the exact situation and acting like they're jerks for wanting to know what's going on.
6. Her habit of over-explaining things. For example, she phoned up the Crime Lab as a prank wanting to know when it was going to "process the tusks of my wombats for latent prints". Of course, we wouldn't have realised this was stupid if she hadn't specified that, "wombats don't even live in the USA, nor do they have tusks". Similarly, prank calls where she "requested detailed information on how to properly destroy blood evidence and reduce a body to ash". Naturally, we wouldn't have got the joke if she hadn't specified that this was to "[leave:] the impression I had just killed someone".
7. The way incidents stretch out over paaaaaages and paaaaaages unnecessarily.

Nonetheless, parts were interesting. With much better editing, it could have been a not-bad book.

Jessica says

This author is a bitch. I'm sorry but I truly can't think of a more apt description of her. Actually I can but it's

worse than the word I just used. In her little book she spends countless pages harshly judging and criticizing others. In no specific order:

*She talks about a house call with a drunken woman she spends (wastes) paragraphs about how ugly she is and calling her a beast and so forth.

*She makes fun of an obese man and refers to him as "Butt Front" because he's so fat his stomach looks like an ass.

*She writes about "those" neighborhoods, wink, wink. Reminded me of when I was told by a company not to submit the resumes of "those kind of people".

*She picks apart a burglary victim on the account that he had the audacity to have hairy feet that she found "ghastly". She refers to him as Frodo and says he should be in the circus. In the same story she bemoans that "Frodo's" kitchen is filthy and make the observation that the female significant other "sucked at housekeeping". I guess that outdated thinking crosses into her thoughts on women's roles as well.

*She writes of a gentleman who accidentally kills himself via autoerotic asphyxia and calls him "Mr. Fancy Pants" because he was dressed as a woman and apparently also because she has the mental maturity of a 12 year old bully.

*When she calls a funeral home to get a quote on some coffins for remains that were removed from their original site and needed to be re-interred, apparently she was annoyed by the voice of the lady who answered the phone, goes on to mock her, make the judgment that she was blonde and big-boobed without seeing her and then basically made fun of the girl because she was confused about her calling to buy as many could for the remains of 16 people in her garage. Really? I don't think she was confused because she was stupid, clearly you were calling with an out of the ordinary circumstance. She also surmised the lady's name was Suri or Shiloh or something like that. Because clearly everyone has to have a NORMAL name like Dana.

*She tried to take six skulls on a plane in her carryon baggage and then when she was stopped and questioned by airport security she gets pissy with them for wasting her time and missing her flight, never mind that she didn't have the proper paperwork or identification with her. Oh and the airport lady's pants were too tight. Clearly she has issues with overweight people.

Jeez Louise I could go on and on about this woman. It horrifies me she is in a profession where she has to interact with victims, people with cognitive problems, people with lesser education than her, etc. I'm sure her arrogance and disdain are apparent when she has to get off that high horse of hers and actually work with them

Kristen says

This book is just okay, although it is compulsively readable. I'm now in the third chapter and I continue to have the same complaint at this point as I had when I first started reading, which is that the author has a tone to her writing which seems confrontational. It's as though she's writing the book to prove something, and indeed, the entire first chapter is about how stupid the crime shows are on t.v. and how the real thing is nothing like those shows. Then she goes on to prove that theory being as gross and crass as she possibly can be. The thing is, she's undoubtedly right. But the way she's presenting the material is aggressive and annoying. It's too in-your-face. It's got something to prove. And it's a whole bunch of vignettes and stories about how awesome she is and how killer it is that she made it in this field filled predominantly with men. She IS awesome, and it's wonderful that she made it but I think the book would be more likable if she weren't constantly tooting her own horn. And in three chapters she's found it necessary to use the phrase "swab his rectum" at least 3 times. This is purely for shock and disgust value.

I will read as much of this as I can stand. I wish it were written by someone who didn't seem to have such an incredible chip on her shoulder, and who wasn't using every cliché in the book to try to be funny, clever and cute, all while attempting to come across as deadpan and totally unaffected by the things she sees and experiences. Her descriptions of her own feelings and processes don't make her human and don't let the reader relate to her at all. Instead she keeps herself separate from the reader, and maintains the tired "we're cool because we do gross stuff and don't get burned out but we still have nightmares and we're in a separate club" theme that has been pervasive in books of this type over the last several years. I would have much rather seen the author as a human in a crazy career reacting and experiencing things in a real way rather than this testosterone-fueled, dukes up kind of book she's written.

Michelle says

saw her speak at the NJAFS convention and bought her book there (it's signed, YAY!). wonderful speaker, wonderful writer. I cannot believe these things have happened to her! Fantastic book, totally enjoyable.

Caroline says

NO SPOILERS

A book titled *Never Suck a Dead Man's Hand* isn't going to be normal. Dana Kollmann is a former crime scene investigator who here shares her most bizarre experiences on the job--and bizarre they are. The title comes from an on-the-job fiasco, and it's not even the worst.

During her ten years as a CSI, Kollmann saw it all--until she finally burned out, tired of sacrificing her whole life for the profession: "Overtime, court, and scheduling issues would cause me to miss countless bridal and baby showers, retirement and anniversary celebrations, weddings, birthday parties, doctor's appointments, hair appointments, lunch dates, family dinners, and even the cookout that *I* was hosting." She didn't turn her back on forensics entirely, though. She now passes along her knowledge as a forensics professor.

The book is most valuable as a warning to those considering a career in CSI, a field of study that's on the upswing thanks to the t.v. show "CSI." Kollmann wants people to know, however, the extent to which Hollywood has glamorized the profession. There's no doubt about that after reading *Never Suck a Dead Man's Hand*, but she also explains early on that no CSI in her right mind would go to work in heels and a skirt or with a full face of makeup and coiffed hair. It was workman's boots for Kollmann, unflattering baggy clothing, and a practical ponytail. Many students enter CSI programs expecting the Hollywood version and quickly drop out when they learn the reality. Work hours can be irregular and exhausting; the work itself is gruesome and depressing; and, more than anything, one must have a steel stomach.

The only way to manage CSI work psychologically is to develop an emotional distance, and Kollmann explains that she and her colleagues engaged in a lot of gallows humor. Her decade on the job, however, may have caused her to lose awareness of how inappropriate such humor is outside of the profession. Though much of what Kollmann says is funny, she also often comes off as judgmental of others and heartless, and in these accounts, she and her colleagues don't regard the dead with any reverence, or, as in one case, her colleagues don't *treat* a dead body with respect.

Kollmann's accounts vary in relevance. She dives right into the disgusting thick of things with anecdotes from her most harrowing experiences on the job, accounts that turn the stomach yet are too riveting to stop reading; however, she couldn't maintain this kind of storytelling standard. Other chapters don't fit, either because they have nothing to do with CSI or because they have little to do with CSI.

Nevertheless, when this book is good, it's very good. With descriptions of everything from the amount of CSI gear needed to process a dead body to the decomposition process itself, Kollmann left out nothing. The simply curious reader could read this and be fully done with the subject, and prospective CSIs would be well served if *Never Suck a Dead Man's Hand* were required reading.

Complementary reading: *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*

Kim Morris says

The beginning is the best.

Jen says

EXTREMELY graphic and not for the those without strong stomachs. I generally consider myself to be fairly immune to being "grossed-out," but I had to read this book in small doses. Never-the-less I enjoyed reading it. The author is especially good at telling stories in a way that will captivate you and make it truly worth your time. I also feel like I have a more realistic concept of the life of a CSI (and I'm so happy that I went into research instead of forensics!).

Meaghan says

This was informative and often extremely funny -- my favorite story being the one where she called a funeral home and asked to buy two coffins for "sixteen dead people in beer boxes in my garage" which she had "dug out of the cemetery and needed to put back." (These were old skeletons from an almshouse cemetery that had been uncovered during some construction and needed to be re-interred elsewhere.) The style of writing reminds me of Mary Roach, author of *Bonk: the Curious Coupling of Science and Sex* and other books. Recommended.

Shannon says

What a fun (gross), quick read. :) Be prepared - she spares you nothing! It is the cold hard truth of what she has seen but I found it really interesting. Especially since she comes from this area so it was cool to know that the cases I was reading about were from around here.

I never thought I'd read a book like this but I'm glad I did. It was very entertaining. And it was informative to learn what a crime lab is really like. I'm a CSI watcher and of course it's not at all like TV makes it out to be! :)

Nicole says

The first half chapter was amazing. I was lost in a world of the living having to deal with the dead and all the gore that accompanies these jobs. Then as the book progressed I started to notice she was judgmental, critical, and in some cases downright mean to both victims' families, friends, and victims themselves (burglary victims, ect).

She's even highly offensive when she used the words "midget" and "retarded" to describe thoughts and opinions of others.

To give some examples of her mean streak, she once came upon a delusional/mentally unstable woman and her submissive, if not troubled son in the middle of the night. She spent a lot of time telling us how funny and amusing she found the scene. Rather than care for the outcome of their plight she laughed about how crazy the mom was and how mentally slow the son was. It was humorous to her and she told the story with a comedic tone.

Instead of having some compassion for a raging alcoholic woman and her firefighter husband, she referred to the wife as "The Thing" and called her ugly.

She made fun of an obviously mentally unstable man who had an imaginary wife. She wrote that she used the fingerprint dusting brush she usually reserved for nasty things like toilets to dust "Frodo's" telephone. She got great pleasure in imagining him using the phone without realizing she dusted it and getting not only the germs from her nasty brush but also black face. Her reason? Because he annoyed her. (She called him Frodo because of his large, hairy feet...so she's not above name calling in her book either) It was heart-wrenching reading the pleasure she got from being so mean and cruel to someone who is obviously mentally challenged.

Now that I've explained how mean and cruel she can be, let me tell you how she managed to annoy me. She has a whole chapter on human excrement. It would be explainable if it contained stories of how the dead are sometimes found in it or around it but the first part of that chapter was dedicated in telling toilet stories of herself, her co workers, and others (not dead). It didn't make any sense being in this book. It was just gross. She did throw in a couple of stories of how excrement played a role in some of the deaths she had to work, but otherwise, the chapter only served to gross us out. Her meanness peaked through again with her telling the very detailed (unnecessarily) of the time she flushed the gas station toilet that was already packed with paper and it overflowed, excrement and all on the floor and out the door. She was on duty at the time and was there to process a robbery scene. Instead of telling the manager of the overflow she claims she ran out of there while he was busy talking to a police officer. She said another officer went to use the bathroom after she left and he was blamed for the overflow. She thought that was very hilarious while I find it immature and unprofessional. And....as I said before... unnecessary. That story as was most of the human excrement chapter had no place in this book.

I'm very disappointed in the book as I wish the rest of it was as good as the first several pages. I thought I was getting a writer comparable to books written on the subject by Mary Roach (awesome author, btw). Mary knows how to successfully balance funny with morbid and gore. Kollmann, on the other hand, has a lot of gore but very little funny and almost all meanness. Kollmann is like one of the Mean Girls while Roach is more like the girl-next-door who is funny and charming.

I'm sticking with Mary Roach from now on.

Jody McGrath says

This book is so awesome. It is about a serious subject but the dark humor is laugh out loud funny. Not a book to read in public, if you don't want to be stared at. I had to read a lot of the scenes out loud to my DH. If you like NF science type books, I highly recommend this book!

Lyndsay says

I took a bunch of classes with Dr. Kollmann at Towson University, and the book is a good addition to her many anecdotes. She definitely has a certain tone in her writing but I found it amusing and right on par with what you'd get from her in person. If you're sensitive about death, gore, etc, then obviously this is not the book for you. It's not a textbook about forensic practices and it's not a crime thriller. It's just some stories about Dr. Kollmann's experiences as a CSI, and how ridiculous the job can sometimes be. I think her derisive tone towards the media is at least in part due to the vast amount of misconceptions the media puts in her students' and colleagues' minds. There's a limited number of times one can be asked if you wear high heels to collect sperm at a crime scene before you want to choke someone. The book is a quick read with a lot of humor (if you don't mind dark humor) so if you like forensics, give it a try.

Aleithea says

There is no one funnier than Dana Kollman when it comes to making the best of a bad situation. Humor is a necessary part of her work, or it's just too depressing. A good, fun read!

Melissa says

Easily the best book on forensics I've ever read. Gross but HILARIOUS

Lori Summers says

I hated this book. I wouldn't have finished it were it not for The Project and that I needed it for the tally.

I have a longtime fascination with forensic science (which I had way before it was cool and popular, I feel compelled to point out) and studied it for a short time in graduate school, so pop-science books about it are usually a fun read. One of my favorites of the genre is *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*, by the late William Maples, one of the founders of the science of forensic anthropology.

This book promised an inside look at the life of a real crime scene analyst and her adventures. What we got were some drawn-out, not terribly interesting anecdotes with no beginning, middle or end, related by an

extremely unpleasant narrator who seems to have nothing but contempt and disdain for everyone who isn't her. She writes her "adventures" as if she's writing a sitcom script starring herself as the cleverest, most snarky ones, giving herself all the best smartass lines. I say "best" with tongue in cheek, but she isn't very funny, but clearly thinks she is.

The book is also rife with egregious editing errors. Three times the word "hoards" is used when "hordes" is intended. The tone is offensive, there are long tangents into things I don't care about (such as her mother's superstitiousness and – no kidding – the toilet habits of pretty much everybody Kollman knows), and based on the slapdash way she seems to have gone about her job I'll be amazed if she ever gets another one once people read this book.

Not recommended.
