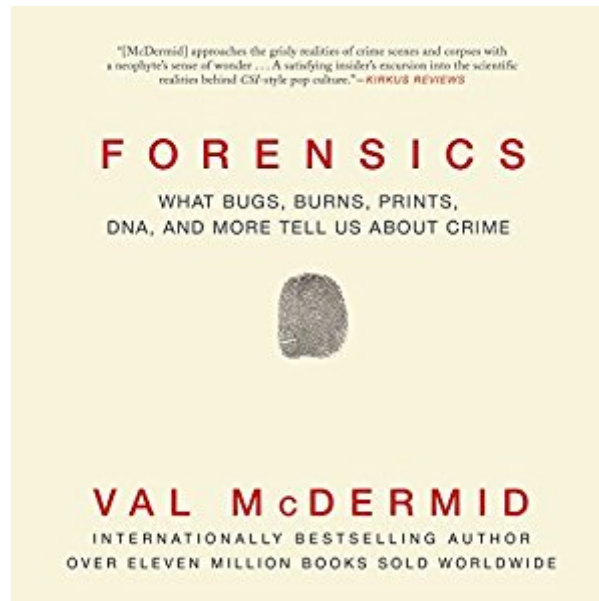




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# Forensics: What Bugs, Burns, Prints, DNA, And More Tell Us About Crime



## Synopsis

The dead talk - to the right listener. They can tell us all about themselves: where they came from, how they lived, how they died, and, of course, who killed them. Forensic scientists can unlock the mysteries of the past and help serve justice using the messages left by a corpse, a crime scene, or the faintest of human traces. Forensics draws on interviews with some of these top-level professionals, groundbreaking research, and Val McDermid's own original interviews and firsthand experience on scene with top forensic scientists. Along the way McDermid discovers how maggots collected from a corpse can help determine one's time of death; how a DNA trace a millionth the size of a grain of salt can be used to convict a killer; and how a team of young Argentine scientists led by a maverick American anthropologist were able to uncover the victims of a genocide. It's a journey that will take McDermid to war zones, fire scenes, and autopsy suites and bring her into contact with both extraordinary bravery and wickedness as she traces the history of forensics from its earliest beginnings to the cutting-edge science of the modern day.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If the study of forensics were put on a chart, it would look like human population. It would flatline for thousands of years, then suddenly take off about 200 years ago, and shoot straight up in the 21st century. Val McDermid leverages that parabolic curve in her crime fiction. Her research is meant to make her stories exciting, amazing and authentic. But as in everything, truth is stranger than fiction, and Forensics is amazing because it traces these astonishing developments in depth. The level of

sophistication seems to rise almost daily, changing the nature of investigations, the rate of convictions, and the very process of justice. Cold cases can be revived and solved, and the wrongly convicted can go free. Sometimes. Along the way, it is inevitable that the reader learns some odd facts: -dead bodies absorb arsenic from surrounding soil, making the claim of arsenic poisoning suspect. -hair grows about a centimeter month, allowing scientists to track drug consumption. -the iPhone 5S has a specialized location chip that runs off reserve power. People have reported their iPhones continuing to track their movements for four days after the battery has died and the phone shut itself off. -thanks to various insatiably curious scientists, we know the thickness of facial flesh and can reconstruct faces from skulls. We can determine the size and shape of an entire body from a bone fragment. We know what bugs consume dead human flesh, when they do it, what stage of life they were at the time, and can pinpoint the time of death by them. -the study of blood splatter has come to the point where we can reconstruct everything about the scene from it. Tiny splatters of DNA-worthy blood are now expected and found in places no one ever looked before. -women are 85% of forensic psychologists. -the British police hire scientists and psychologists to solve crimes, creating profiles from the clues at the crime scene. They help narrow the list of suspects and focus searches. And add their own errors and prejudices. Forensics would do Sherlock Holmes proud. It makes a continually changing and fascinating read. The successes, failures and abuses of the system share space with the human sloppiness and mistakes that land innocent people in prison for life “or worse. McDermid demonstrates them concretely and fairly. She obviously both loves and appreciates it all, and it shows. David Wineberg

I never would have picked this book, but it was a book group choice and I had to purchase it rather than wait for the library list to get to me to be on time. I enjoyed the details and the interesting definitions and descriptions. I felt sad that so many people kill other people. I did go to sleep a couple of times while reading, because I did not want to know that much detail. It is very well written. Good to read something different.

I teach physiology and pathophysiology, and so I'm kind of interested in the opposite of these classes, which would be forensics. I often have to talk about muscles and how they work while people are alive, so it is paramount that I understand how these things work when they are dead (such as rigor mortis). I've read a couple of forensic books before, but I found this one fascinating. It's written by someone from Great Britain, but I found the information shared from over there on various cases and how forensics helped to solve some of these cases. The author of this book

apparently writes crime fiction, which I enjoy once in a while...but this book is a good introduction to the field of forensics. The writing is very understandable, and there isn't an overload of science in it which might confuse some readers. Like other reviewers said, she has a nicely conversational style. I personally will look for something with more of the science in it. I wasn't expecting a book loaded with scientific information, so I wasn't disappointed. I've learned to read the reviews of other readers so that doesn't happen to me. On the whole, a good basic book on forensics to start out with.

This book is very much like a textbook. It details the history of forensics and gives examples of why and how certain processes and techniques came about and were developed. I found it to be quite dry and came close several times to quitting reading it. For those readers seeking sensational cases and gory details, look elsewhere. It also had several typos, which surprised me, given the author's amount of research and attention to detail.

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