



Blood Beneath My Feet: The Journey of a Southern Death Investigator

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Have you ever been locked in a cooler with piles of decomposing humans for so long that you had to shave all the hair off your body in order to get rid of the smell? Joseph Scott Morgan did. Have you ever lit a Marlboro from the ignited gas of a bloated dead man's belly? Joseph Scott Morgan has. Have you ever wept over a dead dog while not giving a shit about the dead owner laying next him? Morgan did. Were you named after a murder victim? Joseph Scott Morgan was.

This isn't Hollywood fantasy—it's the true story of a boy born into the deprivations of a white trash trailer park who as an adult gets further involved in the desperate backdoor sagas of the "new South." No hot blondes here, just maggots, grief, and the truth about forensics and death investigation.

Joseph Scott Morgan became a death investigator with the Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office in suburban New Orleans in 1987, the youngest medicolegal death investigator in the country. During the day, Morgan worked in the morgue, and at night investigated for the coroner. In 1992 Morgan became senior investigator with the Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office in Atlanta. Morgan is now a college professor at North Georgia College and State University, where he teaches a death investigation course based on the national standards which he helped develop. He and his family reside in the Blue Ridge Mountains of north Georgia.

Blood Beneath My Feet: The Journey of a Southern Death Investigator Details

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From Reader Review Blood Beneath My Feet: The Journey of a Southern Death Investigator for online ebook

Danica says

Very interesting and deeply scary/sad book. After a while it seemed that it was less about the experience and more about how much the author was emotionally destroyed by his job. This was almost harder to read than the death investigations. I couldn't help but feel that he came to the job so scarred that the breakdown was inevitable, so it was very depressing.

Karen says

I really really enjoyed this book. The author really impressed me. However I did not read it quickly. It's a short book that could be read in a matter of hours. However there are a lot of dark parts in the book. Since fiction is what I normally read with a happily ever after, I could not finish this book in one sitting. I needed a break from it. I really liked how most chapters the author tied the beginning to the ending of each chapter. So many things impressed me about this book. The author did a thankless and gross job for most of his life. I also liked that the author pointed out things about death investigation that I didn't know.

On a side note, I think the author could write good fiction. He did well in telling his story.

Karalena Sprouse says

Not bad

I was expecting a little more in depth look at specific cases but it was a good read. It was interesting.

Al says

I just got this 2 weeks ago and I read it in the first day. Similar to another "cop" diary type called "Faces of Death" I have in my collection, written with a sense of dark humor that I enjoy. Hell of a last read. Excellent if you like this type of graphic true book.

Mara says

I assume that Joseph Morgan wanted people to read his book, which is why it doesn't quite make sense that he's basically calling you an insensitive a**hole for being curious about his job throughout his stories. Morgan waxes poetical about death for a solid ten pages before the book devolves. He's bitter on every level (which he fesses up to freely), and seems to have a terminal case of the "poor me's" - his is the only job that goes misunderstood and unappreciated.

It's possible that, having read *Twelve Years a Slave* just prior to this book, I was being particularly sensitive, but I found it hard to stomach some of Morgan's reflections on life in the South in combination with his characterizations of minorities. I'm all for respecting his ancestor veterans, but as the book goes on I started getting kind of a weird vibe...

Morgan asserts that:

"...if the Yankees had understood the... matriarchal familial structure in the South ...the War of Northern Aggression would have been shortened by half and the North would have handed over half of its own territory to booth..."

just pages before getting into his experience at a crime scene in the projects (which he describes as *...pretty much standard: a black male lay dead on the bare dirt courtyard of a public housing unit*) where he encounters what he calls "clowns" *hovering along the margins*.

They will be yelling things like, "Naw, naw, naw, dat my boo!" or "Dat my brother!" or the ever-popular "Dat my baby's daddy!" Soon after that, the scene tends to escalate into someone clutching their stomach or their head or screaming at anyone who tries to help them, "Get yo' fuckin' hands offa me!" or "Lawd help me, I gonna kill me a motherfucker tonight."

Ignoring for a moment the whole "War of Northern Aggression" bit (South Carolina and Fort Sumter ring a bell?), his experiences at the scene were what they were, but for someone who goes on at length about the lack of compassion for the dead, you would think he'd allow for, well, something. It certainly doesn't help that five pages later he reminisces:

If Southerners had their way, all the roads would still be two lanes, Jeff Davis' birthday would still be a state holiday, and everyone who did not attend church would be publicly chastised.

Was he trying to be ironic when, two pages later, he takes great care to portray the injustice of his stepfather using forsythia branches as a "switch"?

As the first lash stung my flesh, my toes curled in pain. Six more followed, leaving red stripes on the backs of my legs.

This book was \$1.99 on Amazon, and some irrational decision-making mechanism in my brain convinces me that if I don't buy it I'm basically losing money... Hopefully this is a lesson learned.

Adam McPhee says

Explores death investigation and the culture and poverty of America's urban south, in Atlanta and New Orleans. Occasionally it got a little too real for me, specifically the last two cases and the 12 page photographic insert. Still, it was worth reading. The author cares about where he comes from and is able to

look at it without being overly cynical on the one hand or diving into civic boosterism on the other. And while his job takes its toll on him, you're glad that there are people out there like him doing it.

There's also a bunch of stuff about his family's history, but that was harder for me to care about because I don't really believe in the civil war.

Kristine says

More about the author's PTSD and family history than actual forensics cases. The cases he did mention seem to only be added to illustrate a point he was making about his family's past. To quote the author "by the end caring was pointless."

Jordan says

This novel packs quite a punch. More than just a cavalcade of horrors witnessed in his profession (though there are plenty of macabre anecdotes), this is a story of the author's journey through a harrowing profession, chronicling the toll it takes on him. He shares plenty of stories of his family, his upbringing, always managing to somehow smoothly tie it back to something he experienced as part of his job. Powerfully written, I found myself numbed by the potency of the writing.

Rick Portier says

Joe the Death Investigator has seen it all, and he's ate up with self-loathing.

I read the book on a recommendation from a friend. Reading the jacket, it had promise, but that's about where it ended. There are lots of opportunities for insight into the mind of a death investigator, but Joe squanders those chances opting instead for graphic descriptions of festering corpses and the decompositional fluid that slides beneath his feet.

I'm no prude. I like a good gross-out scene. The grittier the better, but Joe's are there only for gag-factor. These may be real descriptions of actual crime scenes, but author Joseph Scott Morgan provides little context for his crimes and delivers them with the subtlety of a mallet to the head.

Some of the crimes are actually interesting, but Morgan misses the boat by not giving us a character to cheer for. Joe the Death Investigator is completely miserable, and shows the reader very few redeeming qualities. A poverty-stricken, abusive childhood, a half-endearing relationship with grandparents, and a family tree of miscreants. There's simply nothing to make me like Joe.

Written like an ex-cop trying to emulate a crime writer's idea of what a cop story should sound like, the chapters meander around trying to draw parallels between Joe's childhood and his sorry mental state as a cop. By the final chapter, I was hoping he would blow his own brains out. It would have probably been a more fitting end to the story.

If you haven't guessed, I am not a fan of the book, but for a dark look inside the grim world of death

investigations, someone might find this interesting, just not me.

Daniel Gaddy says

I might be a bit biased in this, seeing as how I got to meet Joseph Scott Morgan when he agreed to an interview with me for The Anniston Star (One of the most fun stories I've ever written, by the way: <https://www.annistonstar.com/free/a-j...>). That being said, I really enjoyed the book. Morgan is a full-fledged Southern story teller who's subject matter is obviously compelling. Don't get this book expecting a overarching moral or theme to the work, though. It's just a bundle of stories about cases that were hard for him to forget and about family members who shaped his life. But those stories are told exceedingly well.

Nancy Stephan says

In Joseph Morgan's "Blood Beneath my Feet," the author takes us along as he investigates Death's handiwork. The storytelling is exquisitely graphic, dark, and funny as hell. As he investigates death, Morgan searches for validation and questions the meaning of his own life. The industry has left him jaded, a bit bitter, and wonderfully sarcastic, and in my opinion, it's about time we got some writing that ain't been all prettied up.

Trisha Slay says

Make no mistake, this book is a gritty, graphic, and (at times) downright nauseating look at the reality of being a death scene investigator. As such, it is a valuable counterpoint to all of the sanitized and even glamorized depictions of death investigations so prevalent in books, movies & tv. I grew up watching Quincy and I love a good CSI as much as the next ghoulish mystery fan. But seriously, society needs more raw, honest nonfiction that unflinchingly describes the reality.

Why? In recent years, I've been rather amazed at the number of teens and young adults who, with an earnest, avid excitement in their eyes, have told me their "dream career" would be in CSI/forensic pathology. Zoinks! What do you say to a fairly intelligent young person who has no clue what they might be getting into? I would suggest giving them this book.

Back in the mid-90's, I worked in the cruelty investigations division of an urban humane society. Our victims were fuzzy, not human, and I cannot claim to have seen even 1/10th of the horrors Joe saw during his career, but I have plenty of my own horrifying memories of maggots, decomp, necropsies and the twin faces of ignorance and evil that lurk just beneath the surface of most crime scenes.

As a previous reviewer noted, Joe is still very emotional about many of the terrible things he saw and experienced. Yes, his anger, loathing and disgust are front and center in his writing style. I don't think that is necessarily a negative when you consider the message he was communicating in this memoir and I applaud him for his honesty.

I read this book in one sitting. This is a quick read, but not necessarily an easy read. While I did not always "enjoy" the depiction of the most lurid details, the narrative style is compelling, difficult to set aside, and I

fully understand that the details were necessary to the overall theme and message of the book.

Pamela says

This is definitely a memoir as the author carefully weaves stories from his childhood with instances of his death investigations. It is well written, almost lyrical but with gritty Southern vernacular. The book has selected cases with some gore, but mostly it is an inner monologue of a damaged soul. Obviously, the daily interaction with death has scarred this author and left him with multiple doubts and questions and a lot of cynicism about the living, rather than the dead. Setting all glamour aside, he tells the non-TV side, the seedy side with all its putrid odors, and it becomes obvious that daily exposure to violent, messy death can eviscerate a person who thinks and feels and empathizes. If a reader wants only the blood and gore, this isn't it. This book is a psychological journey with Death.

Melinda Elizabeth says

The author mentions fairly early on in this autobiography that melancholy has permeated every facet of his life and indeed, the book reeks of it. There's usually two approaches to forensic books- the factual, dry as lengthy scientific approach and the other involves injecting some humour and jazz into the mix. This autobiography tries something new: incessant waffling.

Perhaps this book would be better received if it was marketed for what it actually is, a rambling book about a southern man with a lot on his mind, with the occasional excerpt about a death scene. It typically goes like this : "when I was young my father beat me with a stick. That reminds me of this case I was called to where the guy had killed himself by beating himself senseless with an electrical cord around his penis".

Unfortunately this book is just not right and I don't think the colour photos in there add any value to the book, nor are they referenced and seem to be there to shock. So if you're squeamish, or wish to avoid foetal death photos, pick something else to read. These pictures seem to be there just to say "see? This is why I'm so messed up!" But buddy, you were messed up way before then..

Amy says

DNF Just not well written, only just into chapter 3 and it's not talked about the job or science at all, it's all about the author and his history, the surrounding area, such ponderings as 'if Atlanta and New Orleans are whores...' It's seems to be very much look how tough this life is and what it did to me...But I made it out.
