

The Mulching of America



"Harry Crews is a storyteller who bears down
on American enterprise with fierce eyes and a cackle."

—Valerie Sapers, *The New York Times Book Review*

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Hickum Looney is determined to win Soaps for Life's annual sales contest - and this year he has an edge. Looney has found that ideal customer: the proverbial little old lady, who swallows all his patter, introduces him to all her friends, and helps him fill a record number of order books. But before he can claim the Cadillac, the trip to Disney World, and the \$2,000 in cash as his own, Looney must contend with the Boss, a man who outsells his own salesman year after year.

The Mulching of America Details

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Author : Harry Crews , Karolina Harris (Designed by)

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Philip Fracassi says

Whatever. I don't get Crews. Sorry, wish I did...but I don't.

I don't necessarily trust writers from Florida, in general.

Sharon says

Funny and disturbing indictment of the business of sales in America and how it affects the soul - imagine Coupland, O'Connor, Palahniuk thrown together in a blender.

John-Christian says

Not my favorite Crews but still strong on his vivid depiction of out-of-the-mainstream characters and their stories.

M Navalinski says

"A company of integrity and honor controls everything" Such is the credo of Soaps for Life. Join Hickum Looney, ace salesman and glutton for punishment, in his 25th year of door to door activity for the company. Meet The Boss, Ida Mae, Slimy, and a whole cast of surreal characters guaranteed to keep your head spinning from the absurd work Crews delivers. If you enjoy the likes of Thomas Berger and Joseph Heller, Crews is absolutely worth diving into. If you like the straight stuff that doesn't explore the dark, bizarre and contradictory side of life's underbelly, stay away and read Grisham, Patterson or your more conventional types. If you have a penchant for weirdness, get on board with Harry Crews!!!!

Lester says

I have not read a better book by Harry Crews.
This is an amazing book!!

Bill Sanwald says

I didn't like this one as much as "Scar Lover". I'll read more Crews but I think I'll take a break for now.

Erik Wyse says

While not amongst the strongest of Crews' career, *The Mulching of America* is not without its deranged charm, a study in American Greed and class struggle. Crews pushes the characters to their limits, bending and sometimes breaking them along the way. In this particular world, everyone has their faults, and no one escapes unscathed.

Rachel says

(written 12/02)

Great book about a soap company and soap salesmen. The characters are all perfectly weird, and the Company is some kind of Higher Power. Elmo Jorovah is the Boss (Jehovah?) and the employees, unquestioning, take his Word, the Sales Manual, as law and guidance for their lives. The Manual is often incorrect on purpose, and everything the salesmen say comes straight from it. The Boss seems to see all and hear all, uses his omnipotence to scare everyone into believing. Sounds familiar! There are definitely two levels on which this book can be taken. I prefer the allegorical one. It is subtle enough, however, that you only realize it at certain points, and I didn't get the whole picture until I finished the book and thought it over a little. I'd recommend it for anyone who can handle colorful language and the bashing of organized religion. I sure can!

Jodi Mae says

Talk about death of a salesman, of occupy wall street, or corporate control of everything and everyone, of zombie like slaves to the wage. This funny, colorful, horrifying book foresees it all. Written in 1995: Truth is no stranger than strange fiction. The most important book of the 20th century. Should be read by all high school seniors before they make that leap into college and adult world. Maybe it will make them think before they leap into that dark mulch pile abyss.

J says

I was introduced to Harry Crews when I happened upon a collection of his essays entitled *Florida Frenzy* and I have to admit that I expected more from this novel than it delivered. I'm not giving up on Crews, but this certainly didn't live up to the hype surrounding him nor the intriguing nature of his essays. It starts out interesting enough, with engrossing characters and a setting that presents Hickum Looney as an everyman living an entirely futile existence. About halfway, the book starts slowing to a crawl and ends abruptly with little more than a gasp. I'll try to not provide spoilers, but I would have much rather seen the story become about Bickle's revenge being strong enough to turn the Company's management team upside-down. He could have systematically dismantled the team and taken the Lip's position as Boss, allowing the Company to stay an oppressive character in the employees' lives and bringing the readers to a place of thoughtfulness concerning their place in their own worlds ordered and arranged by company madness. But, that didn't happen. Instead, it seems to have ended in a weak metaphor about America being mulched and used as fertilizer.

Jaycee says

Awful! Don't bother. I mean it.

wally says

another great story from harry crews. a soap salesman, a girl, other folk. harry uses a finnish word in this one, maybe the longest one-word palindrome in the world:

saippuakivikauppias: door to door soap salesman. hickum looney.

"jesus scared the hell out of hickum, not because he was a believer but because he was superstitious."

"people nowadays don't seem to know what's public and what's private. they just go ahead and tell anything and everything."

...hickum, having "caught the scent of blood spoor, the sweet fragrance of old mortality."

a pile of zany characters living the dream but life and all that entails keeps getting in the way. still they plug on and try to make do.

David says

WARNING --- FIZZY GRAVY ALERT!!

Truth in Reviewing: I didn't finish this, didn't even make it to page 100. But I read far enough to know that I really just had no desire to punish myself further. Crews mines the seamy underbelly of the white trash south for yuks, and it's funny for a while. But subtlety is not part of his arsenal, so things just get weirder and weirder, until you're in a universe so bizarrely warped, you wonder what the point of reading on might be.

So I could (barely) forgive him the megalomaniac head of Soaps for Life, who terrorizes his door-to-door salesforce with Hitlerian zest. I thought I could forgive him giving The Boss a harelip and a huge Napoleon complex. Until one too many sentences like this:

"I always have na use a whip na drive all nu people about nike beasts, and nu have na nerve na nell me nure late because nu stayed out nair and sold of nure own free will?"

By the time the book's (anti)hero, Hickum Looney (yes, really), undergoes ritual humiliation by the rest of the Soaps for Life salesforce, culminating in his being stripped only to his skivvies, causing him to lose control of his bowels, left to drag his bescumbered body through the 90-degree heat in search of his car -- well, by then, I had my doubts.

The clincher was having Crews mention at least four times in a couple pages the motions of Hickum's wrinkled, shrivelled member during this car-seeking odyssey, not neglecting to remind us of the 'black crusty streaks'

Look, I love a book that mixes eschatology and scatology as much as the next guy. But it's a delicate balance, Harry. One which you singularly failed to achieve here. Unless you were trying to work out some deep toilet training issues of your own.

Life is way too short for this kind of lientery.

Lynn Demarest says

It kills me to give this only three stars, and perhaps the fault is my own, but after a successful takeoff the novel for me seemed to veer off course and sputter out.

The Boss takes on three names (father, son, holy spirit) and then hands over the reigns to the old lady who helped Hickum make his sales record, who turns out to be just as inhuman as he was, sends the boss to the mulcher, where everyone winds up.

Then a murder I didn't care about because I didn't really know Slimy. And then Slimy gets mulched and added to the impressive flower beds.

Yeah, I get it. Working's a bitch, but the end here is just too strange for me to follow.

The writing still shone.

Matthew says

This was a fun read with quirky and memorable characters. A little dated, but nostalgic is a weird way.
