

BOOK REVIEW

*Dennis M. Payne*¹

Review of: *Dead Reckoning: The New Science of Catching Killers*

REFERENCE: Baden M, Roach M. *Dead reckoning: the new science of catching killers*. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 2001, 288 pp.

This book is primarily a descriptive work of the interactions and experiences of the primary author while he was working as a chief medical examiner in New York. The author describes a few of the major cases in the past several years and highlights several mistakes made by on-scene-investigators.

As presented, the book would not be a useful addition to any forensic science class. For an aspiring criminal investigator, the book does offer some useful caveats in the processing of crime scene evidence. Chapter 2 describes a blood spot analysis program conducted by a friend of the author, but as presented, it does not serve any useful purpose. Chapter 3 provides some insight for the expert witness. Chapter 4 describes autopsy protocols, but again, it is of little value from a practical standpoint. Chapter 5 presents a case Henry Lee worked on, but the bulk of it is a description of Mr. Lee's characteristics. Overall, the first five chapters contain stories and the author's impressions.

¹ Associate Professor Emeritus, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.

Chapter 6 does provide some guidance on how to obtain evidence from crime scenes with candid references and impressions from the O. J. Simpson trial and musings from that of Jack the Ripper. Details of investigator omissions at the Brown/Simpson—Goldman crime scene and that of Christian Brando may be useful for a novice investigator. Though entitled “Scenes” the chapter more accurately could be named “Analysis of errors from a few famous crime scenes.”

Chapter 7 merely provides the reader with a graphic description of a summer entomology class conducted by Dr. Neal Haskell. A lot of discussion and description of the examination of maggots on the remains of pigs left to be invaded are interesting, but provide little in the way of instruction. Such a chapter may be useful to one aspiring to become a forensic entomologist, but is very focused on one subject. Chapters 8 and 9 provide the author's considerations of evidence that can be obtained from exhumations and victims' heads.

There is no doubt the author has conducted thousands of autopsies during his career and has a vast storehouse of experience. As opposed to a scientific work or a criminal investigative book, I found it more of a reflection of one's own outstanding career with highlights of interesting aspects of forensic practices.