



Poison: An Illustrated History

Joel Levy

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Discover the secret history of poison and how it shapes our world.

From Cleopatra to Mary Ann Cotton, from cone snails to cocaine, this lavishly illustrated book will take you on a fascinating journey through the mysterious world of potions, magical herbs, and psychoactive preparations-substances at once alluring and terrifying. *Poison* captures them in all their complexity, describing the many roles they have played in history and culture, science and religion, medicine and murder.

Poison: An Illustrated History Details

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From Reader Review Poison: An Illustrated History for online ebook

David Szatkowski says

An insightful book that looks at not only the history of poison, but also how poisons can also be cures. An easy read that lends itself to the beach, the armchair, or casual reading where ever you may want a book.

Nikki says

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

I've been joking that my wife should be worried I picked this up, but really I was here to understand how poisons work. Although the 'social history' part of the title is definitely true, describing famous historical poisoning cases, it also includes little profiles on each poison which explain how it has the effects it has in chemical terms. I already knew some of the most notorious ones (partially because of the excellent book on Agatha Christie's use of poisons, *A is for Arsenic*), but there were others I didn't know.

Overall, it's a bit shallow, focusing on some of the most sensational cases of poisoning and basically whipping around the types of poison that're out there and how they've been used for suicide, assassination, etc. Still, it had its interesting points, and if you're interested in true crime there's a couple of cases I knew nothing about.

Not something to rush out and get, in my opinion, and while spouses should maybe be worried it'd put ideas into someone's head, there's no practical information about obtaining poisons or anything dangerous like that! It really is much more about the history, with explanations of how poisons actually do their damage.

Violetta says

Fascinating topic, written with an ear for the drama as well as the science behind poisons, in all their forms. Remember, it's not inherent in "poisons" to be deadly, it's how the substances are *used* that makes the difference.

Icy Sedgwick says

I've long had a passing interest in toxicology, and I originally bought this book as a research tool for a fictional endeavour. It turns out that it's absolutely fascinating. Beginning with an explanation of what constitutes poison, and where it may be found (marine animals, plants, minerals etc.), the book then goes on to detail examples of poison in its different uses. Poison as Executioner, Assassin, Saviour and even Medicine are all covered. The author also includes flash pages of the more famous poisons, such as belladonna, strychnine and antimony, including the lethal dose required, any known antidote, where it is

found and what its symptoms are, as well as famous victims.

It's incredibly up to date, as well as being interesting, and is interesting not only as a research tool for writers, it's also fascinating for its social history as well. On top of that, it's a very attractive book, with interesting typography and a tidy lay out. It also features coloured flash pages and beautiful illustrations or small photos of the victims and poisons in question.

R K says

Einstein once said that if you're unable to explain a concept to a 6 year old, then you don't know the concept yourself.

This book is the epitome of what Einstein said. Informative while still retaining the reader's attention, Poison introduces the world of toxicology on a far better level than most professors. It may seem harsh but I truly believe in Einstein's words. Levy has painted the world of poison in a way that is accessible to anyone regardless of their background. He doesn't skimp on the detail explanation or jargon yet he understands that he needs to properly explain what is happening on a chemical level to readers. It's amazing and deserves valor just for that.

I loved this book. I was entertained to the point of laughing out loud. I was curious and fascinated by how much I learned. Readers of this review.....I TOOK NOTES ON THIS BOOK!

The book is broken into different segments and poison's involvement in each segment. Within each segment we cover infamous poisons such as cyanide, strychnine, barbiturates, and ricin. Many get their own spotlight which explain their history, how it works, symptoms, and treatments. You'd be shocked by how many we still have no cure for. Along with poison backdrop we also get historical information on how the poison was used in each segment. Notorious people known for using said poison are also given a spotlight.

Overall, this was a satisfying read and I highly recommend it. Like taking a bite out of an apple. Better be careful though, apple seeds contain cyanide! ;)

dot says

A nice overview of poisons and their place in history that I liked well enough.

Note: I'm not a book reviewer.

Andrew says

While it's not terribly written, the prose is certainly wanting of sine literary merits and makes an otherwise fascinating topic extremely dry and at times dull.

Bill Powers says

As a toxicologist, found *Poison: An Illustrated History* very informative and entertaining. It does not get bogged down in the weeds, but keeps the information at engaging level. I highly recommend - if you're into poison!

Stephanie Molnar says

Interesting and comprehensive look at poisons, easily read by the average non-medical person.

Jackie says

Okay, perhaps somewhat macabre entertainment but essential reading for murder mystery fans. And it is a lovely book (well, as lovely as a book about poison can be....)

Martine Bailey says

This was a fascinating dip-in book, that took the reader through the gamut of the major poisons along with smart little anecdotes about their uses. Yes, it was macabre at times, but also genuinely interesting. My only gripe was that that it was necessarily superficial, given it's short length. The quote from Paracelsus that 'the dose makes the poison' ie that many substances, from water to common medicines, are poisonous in the wrong doses, will stay with me.

Kelley Cortright says

I found this book to be a really interesting read, filled with historical and scientific trivia. I'm not much of a history buff, so I hadn't heard of most of the stories presented in this book, and I feel like I learned a lot, both about history and the nature of poison. The book appears to have been deeply researched, with an extensive list of references in the back. My only complaint is that the text was riddled with typos--misspelled words, missing words, incorrect grammar. It wasn't enough that it made the book unreadable, but it was certainly enough to make me question whether the author had any kind of editor. Overall, a fun and interesting read.

Meander says

This was a really great overview of poisons, both in telling great stories of poisonings, as well as giving some technical information on the effects of several poisons. My favorite part though was probably where they were discussing the puffer fish and its use in "zombification" according to Voodoo religions.

Grey Riedl says

I thought this book was very good as Levy both explains how a poison works and what cases was it famously used in. He also keeps a very professional tone through out the book, preferring to give facts rather than opinions on the cases in the book. Levy also describes how poison was used for medical purposes and not just death.

Lillian Carl says

A beautifully produced and designed book, with different colored pages for the details of common poisons, illustrations in both color and black-and-white of famous historical episodes, plants, and venomous animals (I had to squinch up my eyes and hurry past the tarantula), and handsome typography. All in the service of an often grim topic.

Levy covers poisons in science, nature, and history, and poisons as executioner, murderer, and assassin (yes, those categories run together), and poison used in suicide.

After two hundred pages or so of stories that will cost you your faith in humanity (for example: Nazis), Levy ends, thankfully, on poison as savior---the therapeutic uses of poisonous substances as anesthetics, painkillers, and so forth.

I suppose it says something about the mystery writer's mind that I'd find a book of this nature enjoyable reading as well as informative!
