

**'The Forensic Laboratory Handbook - Procedures and Practice'**,  
Mozayani A, Noziglia C (Ed), 2006 ISBN 1588294641 £89.50 [Humana Press](#)

University managers have discovered that the 'f-word' resonates with potential undergraduates – adding 'forensic' to previously uninspiring course titles instantly attracts a new cadre of youngsters drip-fed highly unrealistic representations of 'crime science' courtesy of 'CSI: Las Vegas/Miami/New York/ Watford'.

Such is the seemingly insatiable appetite for all things 'CSI', a parallel industry exists to supply a steady stream of 'idiot's guides' to the subject (epitomised by the 'Forensics for Dummies', reviewed below).

All cover the same ground – a brief outing into the world of trace analysis, DNA, toxicology, pathology, odontology and crime scene reconstruction.

Some have covered this ground in an informative and interesting manner, albeit in a superficial way, whilst others barely attempt to do anything more than add to the tabloid driven 'schlock horror' under the guise of a 'science book'.

Happily this book is in the former camp, but will only be of marginal interest to pathologists.

The editors indicate that this book is written **'for the purpose of separating fiction from reality by demonstrating the real-life practices of forensic laboratories'**, utilising chapter authors who 'actually do the job'. In this respect, 'The Forensic Laboratory Handbook' wins in the realism stakes over its nearest rivals.

However, the praise for these scientists is perhaps a bit 'over the top' when they are described as 'unsung heroes' and 'seekers of the truth'.

A consistent theme throughout the book, which is to be applauded, is the constant reference to the limitations of forensic science, and the need for quality assurance systems of the highest order, in order to preserve the integrity of the evidence, and the interpretations made of it. This is in stark contrast to the media derived image of forensic science - high-tech and infallible.

Overview chapters are provided on serology/ DNA, including discussions of testing techniques and statistical interpretation, forensic chemistry, toxicology, fingerprints and trace evidence.

Forensic pathology is covered from an American perspective, with an interesting discussion of the attributes needed by budding forensic pathologists, and 'how to set up a medical examiner's office'. A similar chapter describes the role and function of a forensic odontologist, but again, this is from a US perspective, and differs considerably from the situation in the UK.

Firearms are linked with toolmarks - a useful way of looking at these topics, and the subject is covered satisfactorily, for the lay reader.

Chapters on crime reconstruction and digital evidence are superficial, and only give the reader a 'fleeting glimpse' of these interesting areas.

If readers need a quick summary of what forensic science is all about, they would do worse than to dip in to this text. More detailed forensic expositions are probably required, however, for the forensic trainee, and this is probably not going to be 'required reading' for general pathology trainees.