



Skull Duggery

Aaron Elkins

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No one solves crimes like Skeleton Detective Gideon Oliver.

Gideon and his wife are on vacation in Mexico when a local police chief requests his assistance on a case. A mummified corpse was discovered in the desert and the coroner believed the victim was shot. But Gideon's examination reveals the victim was stabbed with a Phillips-head screwdriver. Then Gideon is asked to examine the skeleton of a murder victim found a year earlier-only to discover another error. The coroner misidentified the remains as belonging to a twelve to fifteen-year-old girl, when in fact the remains were that of a young woman of twenty.

Gideon knows these two "mistakenly" identified bodies aren't a coincidence. But finding the connection between them will prove more dangerous than he could possibly imagine- and place him into the crosshairs of the killer he's hunting.

Skull Duggery Details

Date : Published September 1st 2009 by Berkley Hardcover (first published August 29th 2009)

ISBN : 9780425227978

Author : Aaron Elkins

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction

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From Reader Review Skull Duggery for online ebook

Sundra says

I haven't read this series in a long time. I loved this one. The setting in Oaxaca was interesting and the "mystery" was entertaining. Great bedtime reading!

Chazzi says

The "Skeleton Detective", who is really creation-anthropology professor Gideon Oliver, goes to Mexico with his wife, Julie, for a little vacation at her family's expat relatives. What was to be spent reading, eating and visiting old ruins turns into mystery solving. Not just one possible murder but three!

When the village police chief finds out that Gideon is an expert on bones, he is quick to ask for help in determining if the mummified corpse found outside the village is a victim of foul play or natural causes. Hoping for the latter, the chief is unhappy to find he does have a murder on his hands. A murder that raises questions on a previous death, a disappearance and their ties to Julie's family.

How all these scenarios tie up is intriguing. Along the way, the "Skeleton Detective" explains how he is able to "read" the bones and the body of the deceased and bring to life what may very well have been the cause of death. The fact that he is involved in forensic cases for law enforcement along with his academic life adds to the knowledge.

The plot moves along with a good number of clues and hints, but I was still not ready for the end result. I will keep my eye out for further books by Aaron Elkins and his Skeleton Detective.

A Goodread for me!

Mackenzie says

Poorly written and full of cliches, painfully predictable plot, paper thin characters, pretentious 'local color'-- The first couple chapters were so awful I almost gave up, but I had to see if I could figure out why this guy has had so many books published. I've finished the book and still have no idea.

Matt says

When the Olivers head down to Mexico on vacation, trouble and mystery come along as well. Visiting the family hacienda at which Julie worked in her teen years, Gideon and Julie agree to take things easy and enjoy the company of family. However, when a mummified body turns up, the authorities seek the assistance of The Skeleton Detective to shed some light on the mystery. Lo and behold, it's murder and Gideon is more than eager to help crack open the case. One body leads to two and a full-on mystery leads to troubles within the hacienda. How do these bodies tie together and how could the local ME be so wrong in his official

determination all those years ago? Gideon must get to the bottom of this.. but beware of someone lurking in the shadows to silence him forever.

While the locales might be somewhat repetitive, Elkins uses the return of previous characters to keep the reader highly enthralled in the tale. With his successful story writing techniques, Elkins uses the narrative (and dialogue) to both entertain and educate. Dr. Gideon Oliver is a wonderfully refreshing academic-type, complete with his eccentric nature and strong-mindedness. While some of the teachable moments seem forced, "So, Gideon, what is a coma?" the majority of the learning the reader will undertake can be seen as useful and academic, complete with Latin and technical phraseology.

Kudos, Dr. Elkins for another great novel!

Dorothy says

Actually a 3.5 and perhaps more. I missed my stop on BART because I was so engrossed in this book. Some of the plot was predictable, but it moved swiftly. Elkins is adept with the English language (and some Spanish as well). A delight to learn new, fun words - like flump (n. the sound or action of a heavy fall; v. fall or sit down heavily). Since I had read Curses and characters from curses popped up here, it was satisfying. Finally, and most shockingly, I learned a new legal fact: Mexico has a statute of limitations to prosecute a murder of 14 years (the US has none). See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/...> This statute is as much a character as any other character in the book, because it tweaks the story. Fun.

Marci says

2.5 stars. Interesting read. I like forensics and archeology stuff, but as far as a "mystery" wasn't very suspenseful and no real surprises.

Kimberly says

I found this to be a fairly light and engaging mystery. I liked the setting (Oaxaca, Mexico) because it's one that I'm not familiar with but would like to learn more about. And the protagonist, Gideon Oliver, is an unusual mystery solver as mystery solvers go. He's a professor of physical anthropology and because of his expertise in bones, he often finds himself assisting police in their investigations. While I tend to enjoy descriptive novels, this one was a little too much sometimes. Chapter 6 springs to mind; for 22 pages, the author goes over every minute detail of Gideon's examination of a mummy. Interesting, but lengthy. Still, the mystery was intriguing and kept me guessing until the end.

Ron Estrada says

This was my first book by this author. I enjoyed it immensely. Anytime I can learn something new, it's a good read. The setting in Mexico made it all the more interesting. He didn't take us to some known location, but instead took us to a province that would be unknown to the average American and immersed us in the

unique culture. If you're looking for a classic mystery style that presents you with a series of clues and invites you to solve the crime, this is a good one. I thought I had it figured out but he caught me and threw in a nice twist.

Dina says

This book reminded me of just how much I like Elkins' Gideon Oliver series. I haven't read any for a few years and was delighted to find this new one. I especially enjoy the sense of place that Elkins brings to his books (Oaxaco, Mexico in this one)--not to mention his wry humor and interesting forensics and anthropology. In this mystery Gideon, on vacation at a family-owned hacienda/dude ranch, is asked to examine some mummified remains that turn out to be only a few months old. That investigation leads to some 30-year-old bones found in an abandoned mine. Eventually all are tied together in a surprising way. Needless to say, the "Skeleton Detective" enjoyed his vacation.

Fran says

Although this is #16 in the Gideon Oliver series, it is only the second book of this series I have read. I started with "Dying on the Vine", set in a part of Italy I love, which I really enjoyed, and picked up this book based on its Mexican setting. One thing I really love about Aaron Elkins' books is his exquisite detailing of local cuisine - his writing make me hungry! Was he a food critic at one point? I'll have to investigate. "Skull Duggery" is no exception here, with the superb local cuisine given as much loving description as the bones so beloved by the protagonist, Gideon Oliver. Mind you, this series is not going to be for everyone. Students of archaeology and forensic science will love the detailed descriptions of skeletons (and in this book, mummification) and methods of murder, but others might find the detail to be overwhelming. The level of detail appeals to me, along with the intricate plot with its wonderful twists. The only criticism I have is that sometimes character development goes by the wayside in favor of those detailed descriptions of the skeletons.

Susan says

surprising ending, very enjoyable read.

Eugene says

Well, I had not paid a visit to Gideon Oliver in a few years, so glad we spent some time together! Still the same quirky bone-obsessed forensic master, and boy does he get involved in some strange stories, but as always, this one has charm, style, a good bit of the magician's spell-casting, and a solution that ties everything up in a pretty bow! I will admit that even a dullard such as I eventually twigged out "who dun it," but by then I didn't care, I was so enjoying the telling that I was bound to read on as quick as I could, and sorry to turn those last pages...Elkins really knows how to catch your attention and keep your interest!

Gayle says

I'm just never disappointed when I read Elkins' Gideon Oliver mysteries. He writes smartly - excellent vocabulary, good background info on the locale(s) and a nicely woven plot. EVERY time.

This particular story took place in the Oaxaca area of Mexico. Julie and Gideon readily agreed to help out Julie's cousin take care of the Hacienda Encantada while her cousin was away for a week. What could go wrong? Quite a lot. With a lot of twists and turns, good information (yes, thank goodness Gideon is a pedant!) and enjoyment it's another great mystery by Elkins.

Pam says

This was a fluff read. The idea for this plot was rather inventive but I think the author spent too much time on description - of people, of places, of procedure, and not enough time on the mystery. The book felt rather two-dimensional and wooden.

John says

Aaron Elkins is one of my all time favorite authors. Nothing complicated with his work, just plain, well plotted murder mysteries which leave you feeling good about having taken the time to read his book(s).

Another benefit to reading Elkins is that he consistently moves around the world with his books and gives the reader an excellent basic feel for wherever the story takes place (in this case Gibraltar).

IO n the end, these are all easy reads which you should use to temper your brain after a more difficult book. You won't be sorry.
