ANIL AGGRAWAL'S

Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 7, NO. 2

Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_007_no_002/reviews/pb/page001j.html

Featured Books

(Review 10 - by Gyan Fernando, UK, Europe)

FEATURED BOOK : QUIZ SECTION

THIS BOOK MAY BE ADAPTED FOR THE BIG SCREEN!



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[Interview with Sylvia Tomlinson] [Quiz based on *Plucked and Burned*]

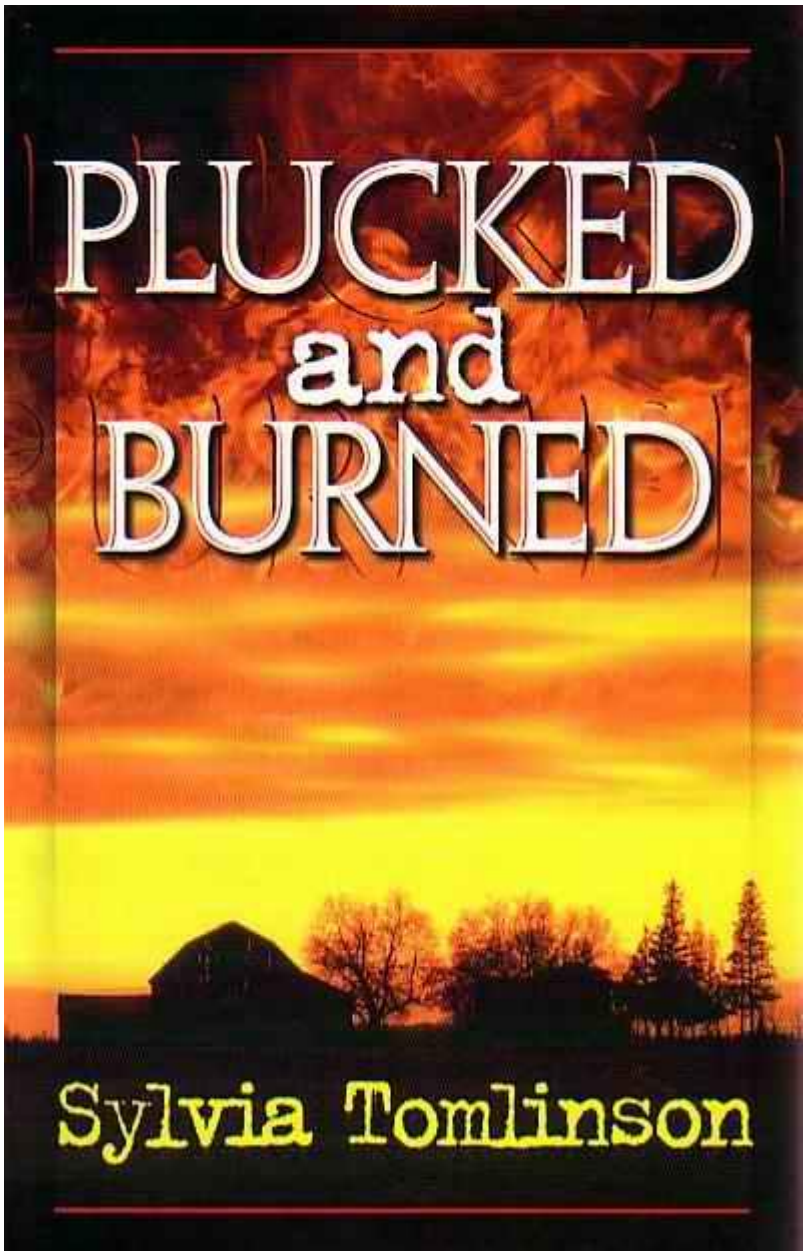
Rating : 10/10
★★★★★★★★★★
(10/5)

Plucked and Burned *by* Sylvia Tomlinson. Paperback, 8" x 6".
Redbud Publishing Co., P.O. Box 4402, Victoria, TX 77903-4402, USA. E-mail: info@redbudpublishing.com Publication Date 2003. x + 237 pages. ISBN 0-9720293-2-X. Price $19.95

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Everybody knows that arsenic is a poison but not everyone knows that arsenic based compounds (albeit in an organic form) are regularly fed to chickens in intensive chicken farms. The chickens of course end up in supermarkets. Next time you visit your supermarket have a look at the vast arrays of chicken on display and think "Arsenic"! If you don't believe that all you need to do is a Google search with the keywords 'chicken feed' and 'arsenic'! Now you know! Do also think of the farmers who are exposed to arsenic just like British sheep farmers are exposed to organophosphorus compounds in the form of 'sheep dip'.

Sylvia Tomlinson 's novel is about intensive chicken farming. It is also socio-political commentary in the form of a novel. Although it is a fictionalised account and written in a dramatic style Tomlinson has drawn heavily on real life experience of intensive chicken farming and the cut-throatism that goes with it. Some of the frightening, real-life aspects can be found in the afterword of the book. If anyone reading this book thinks that the story is farfetched they need only read the afterword.

The story is based in Okalahoma where a group of chicken farmers are in the grip of the giant chicken processing facility of **Poultry Unlimited Farms Inc** . Mortgaged to the hilt they, the farmers, are at the mercy of the unscrupulous farming giant and psychopathic henchmen.

Following a gripping start, when one of the farmers is found hanging from a noose, the story moves on fast with farmer **Doug Blackwelder** as the hero and main character.

There is a big Southern sheriff complete with a 9mm pistol, a typically morbid Coroner (forensic pathologist), Mexican 'wetbacks' and an assortment of characters that one associates with the South.

This of course is an unashamedly goody-goody, 'Good Guys vs. the Bad Guys' type of story. Having been brought up on classic Western stories such as **" Shane "** by **Jack Schaefer** I couldn't help noticing a very slight resemblance between the two works.

...Just like "Shane", Sylvia Tomlinson's book is the sort of book that you think about both when reading it and after finishing the story...
This time it is not the struggle between the poor homesteaders and a wealthy landlord with his hired guns but between poor farmers and a corporate giant with his henchmen. For corporate giants, think of some well-known American companies and you've got it!

Just like " Shane ", Sylvia Tomlinson 's book is the sort of book that you think about both when reading it and after finishing the story. What Tomlinson has achieved is a modern day story and a story about modern day slavery.

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...For a non-American like myself this is rather frightening reading. It seems nothing much has changed in the South since the days of slavery and cotton growing. It is of course not just America. Think of all those Far Eastern and Asian 'sweatshops'!...
It is of course not just America . Think of all those Far Eastern and Asian 'sweatshops'!

I found it a rather gripping story, well written - and equally importantly - well researched. Apart from understanding arsenic poisoning Tomlinson appears to have done much research into death by electrocution, hanging and other violent means. It is clear that she has consulted various experts on the scientific aspects. (They are mentioned in the acknowledgements.)

Even the legal aspects appear to have been well researched. On page 196 there is, for instance, a passing mention of the case of **"Burger vs. Cagle"** . This of course is a real case. There is one minor instance of Tomlinson using 'poetic license' when one of the characters develops myelodysplasia after a somewhat improbably short two-month period of exposure to benzene but other than that the story stands up to close scrutiny.

...The characters, even the secondary ones, are well fleshed out. I found it easy to remember the characters without having to thumb back. The dialogue sounds real and is not patronising. Nor is it stereotyped...
One thing that I learnt is that chicken farming is far, far more complex than I ever imagined.

The climax and the ending are particularly well written and the last few chapters seemed to fly very fast.

Sylvia Tomlinson has an easy narrative style and with considerable attention to detail she builds up a vivid picture in the readers mind. The characters, even the secondary ones, are well fleshed out. I found it easy to remember the characters without having to thumb back. The dialogue sounds real and is not patronising. Nor is it stereotyped.

As far as print quality goes it is a well printed and well presented book.

I wouldn't be too surprised to see the book being adapted for the big screen.

-Dr Gyan Fernando



-Gyan Fernando
Dr Gyan C. A. Fernando is a native of Sri Lanka. He now works as a Forensic Pathologist in Devon, England. He has been associated with this journal since its inception. Dr. Fernando can be contacted at gyan@doctors.org.uk

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