



# The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel

By Charlie Huston

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With his teaching career derailed by tragedy and his slacker days numbered, Webster Fillmore Goodhue makes an unlikely move and joins Clean Team, charged with tidying up L.A.'s grisly crime scenes. For Web, it's a steady gig, and he soon finds himself sponging a Malibu suicide's brains from a bathroom mirror and flirting with the man's bereaved and beautiful daughter.

Then things get weird: The dead man's daughter asks a favor. Every cell in Web's brain tells him to turn her down, but something makes him hit the Harbor Freeway at midnight to help her however he can. Soon enough it's Web who needs the help when gun-toting California cowboys start showing up on his doorstep. What's the deal? Is it something to do with what he cleaned up in that motel room in Carson? Or is it all about the brewing war between rival trauma cleaners? Web doesn't have a clue, but he'll need to get one if he's going to keep from getting his face kicked in. Again. And again. And again.

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

**Amazon Best of the Month, January 2009:** If you love crime fiction--preferably wickedly profane, unabashedly grisly, and laugh-out-loud funny "pulp" fiction--your number one New Year's resolution needs to be to read Charlie Huston. It only takes one to get you so hooked you'll read everything you can get your hands on, so take a couple of days off and give yourself room to binge on the brutal and hilarious Hank Thompson and Joe Pitt series, the blistering *Shotgun Rule*, and this latest and greatest stand-alone, *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death*. The best thing about reading a Huston novel is that you never see it coming--laughter, tears, the passing urge to vomit--everything is a surprise, creating a wholly unsettling and exciting reading experience. *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death* has all the makings of a perfect Charlie Huston novel--the down-but-not-out antihero, the outrageous supporting characters (each of whom deserves their own spin-off), the very bad situation involving money and violence, and the hilariously inappropriate dialogue that is Huston's signature--but with one surprising addition, hope. It does little good to break down the plot of a book this bizarre and brilliant. You're just going to have to trust us (and our Guest Reviewer, Stephen King), and read it. --Daphne Durham

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### Amazon Exclusive: Stephen King Reviews *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death*



Stephen King is the author of too many bestselling books to name here, but some of our favorites include: *Cell*, *The Stand*, *On Writing*, *The Shining*, and his epic *Dark Tower* series. King also received the National Book Foundation 2003 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, has had many movies and television miniseries adapted from his novels, short stories, and screenplays, and is a regular columnist for *Entertainment Weekly*. Read King's review of Charlie Huston's *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death* below.

For more from Charlie Huston, check out his "true stories about messes I've seen, helped clean up, and made" on Amazon's books blog, *Omnivoracious*.

There are some things you never wonder about until someone--usually someone whose mind lives on Weird Street--brings them to your attention. Who cuts the barber's hair? How does a guy wind up with the job of test-smelling armpits for a deoderant company? Or de-wrinkling dress shoes before they're put on sale? Why does one kid become a college dean while another grows up to be a key grip? And just what is a key grip, anyway?

Here's another one. Who scrubs down the scene after a spectacularly messy death--a guy who shoots himself in the head, let's say, or dies of natural causes in a hot back room and then goes undiscovered for a couple of weeks? What sort of janitorial problems would such work entail? It turns out there are firms that specialize in those problems, and in the Weird Street world of Charlie Huston, a couple of these companies might even do battle over the smelly, maggoty spoils of war.

“Trauma scene and waste cleaning is a growth industry,” remarks Po Sin, the owner/operator of Clean Team. The observation comes early in Charlie Huston’s terrific new novel, which is about just what the title suggests: getting rid of the messy stuff after the deal goes down.

When *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death* opens, Webster Fillmore Goodhue--another in a long line of likeably slack Huston protagonists--is sponging off his friend Chev, who runs a sleazier-than-thou tattoo parlor. Enter the proprietor of Clean Team, who knows Web from Web’s previous life as an elementary school teacher (a career that ended badly). Po Sin needs help in his particular growth-industry. Web agrees to a little blood- and brain-scrubbing not because he particularly wants a job but because he’s suffered his own trauma and finds cleaning up other people’s end-of-life messes strangely soothing.

Enter Soledad, a beautiful young girl whose father just aired out his brains with a 9mm. Also enter Jaime, her half-bright half-brother who imagines himself a Hollywood playa but can’t get out of his own way. There are many things to love about Charlie Huston’s fiction--he’s a brilliant storyteller, and writes the best dialogue since George V. Higgins--but what pushes my personal happy-button is his morbid sense of humor and seemingly effortless ability to create scary/funny bad guys who make Beavis and Butthead look like Rhodes Scholars.

There are a lot of those in this book, and several I-can’t-believe-I-laughed-at-that scenes of grue (I can’t even talk about the pipe-bomb thing, not on a family website), but the best thing about *Mystic Arts* is how decency and heroism rise to the top in spite of everyone’s best efforts to crush them under heel.

Web wanders from the nightmarish underworld of body clean-up into the equally nightmarish worlds of hijacking and smuggling; he endures cross, double-cross, and triple-cross; he pees his pants while trying to shield his girlfriend from a bullet. He’s scared but never cowardly, down but never completely out. He is, in short, a guy worth watching.

So’s Charlie Huston. He’s written several very good books (including the *Caught Stealing* trilogy and the Joe Pitt novels, which concern a PI who’s also a vampire), but this is the first authentically great one, a runaway freight that feels like a combination of William Burroughs and James Ellroy. *Mystic Arts* is, however, fiercely original--very much its own thing.

Besides, admit it: you’ve always wanted to know how to get blood out of a deep-pile carpet.

From Publishers Weekly

Huston's darkly comic slice of Southern California noir is filled with distinctive characters that leap from the page and, thanks to Paul Michael Garcia's remarkable versatility, speak in equally arresting voices. Chief among them is Web Goodhue, the novel's narrator, a slacker forced by circumstance into temp work with a crew that mops up messy postmortem residue. Just as Huston makes the outwardly obnoxious and brutally snarky protagonist sympathetic, Garcia layers self-doubt, sensitivity and intelligence beneath the arrogance and an overriding humanity that Web attempts to mask with his misanthropic (often very funny) remarks. The other characters are equally well matched vocally: Web's father speaks with the boozy rasp of a self-loathing alcoholic; Po Sin, the massive boss of the Clean Team, has a deep and rumbling delivery; and femme fatale Solidad tries to hide her naïveté behind hard-boiled banter. Throw in a gallery of motor mouth crazies, flat-voiced killers and Web's amazingly tolerant best friend Chev, and you have a thrilling and smartly enacted audio package. *A Ballantine hardcover (Reviews, Nov. 10). (Jan.)*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

*Mystic Arts*—which critics agree just may push Charlie Huston into crime fiction's mainstream—may not

appeal to readers who cringe at violent, bloody scenes or profane language. Still, "if one tends to find humor in unlikely places," noted the *Denver Post*, "Huston has created a work that is sly, twisted and surprising—one well worth the investment of time." All critics praised the excellent characterization ("brazen originals") and sharp, witty dialogue (that of "a death-defying talent") (*Washington Post*). Some stock plotting dampened a couple of reviews, but critics took delight in Huston's serious, if understated, themes about friendship, life, death.

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Robert Miller:**

As people who live in the actual modest era should be revise about what going on or data even knowledge to make these keep up with the era and that is always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which you should start with. This *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel* is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

#### **Michael Burnette:**

Reading can called mind hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book particularly book entitled *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel* your thoughts will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe not known for but surely can become your mind friends. Imaging every single word written in a book then become one type conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get prior to. The *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel* giving you a different experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful facts for your better life with this era. So now let us explain to you the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind are going to be pleased when you are finished reading through it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

#### **David Wood:**

In this time globalization it is important to someone to get information. The information will make anyone to understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. The actual book that recommended to you personally is *The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel* this guide consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This particular book was represented how does the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some analysis when he makes this book. That is why this book suitable all of you.

**Paul Moore:**

As we know that book is important thing to add our understanding for everything. By a book we can know everything we really wish for. A book is a pair of written, printed, illustrated or even blank sheet. Every year had been exactly added. This reserve The Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death: A Novel was filled with regards to science. Spend your time to add your knowledge about your research competence. Some people has different feel when they reading a book. If you know how big benefit of a book, you can feel enjoy to read a reserve. In the modern era like now, many ways to get book you wanted.

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