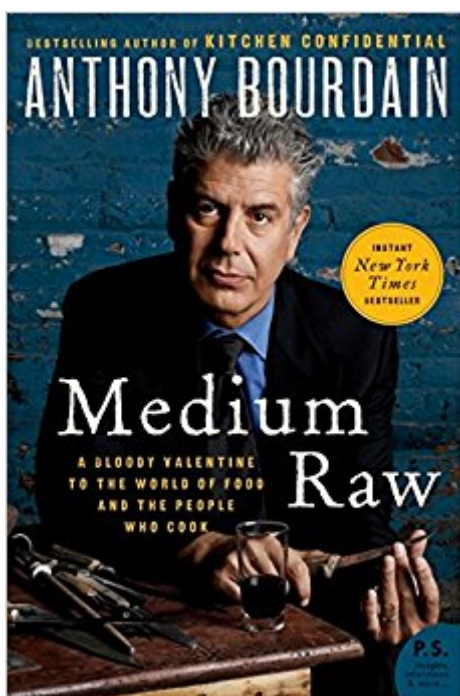


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Medium Raw: A Bloody Valentine To The World Of Food And The People Who Cook (P.S.)



Synopsis

The instant New York Times bestseller and follow-up to Anthony Bourdain's blockbuster classic on the cooking life, *Kitchen Confidential* *Medium Raw* marks the return of the inimitable Anthony Bourdain, author of the blockbuster bestseller *Kitchen Confidential* and three-time Emmy Award-nominated host of *No Reservations* on TV's Travel Channel. Bourdain calls his book, "A Bloody Valentine to the World of Food and the People Who Cook," and he is at his entertaining best as he takes aim at some of the biggest names in the foodie world, including David Chang, Alice Waters, the *Top Chef* winners and losers, and many more. If Hunter S. Thompson had written a book about the restaurant business, it could have been *Medium Raw*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No one really expected Bourdain to top his wildly popular *Kitchen Confidential*, even Bourdain himself: several critics wrote that he seems alternately awed and appalled by his own celebrity. Those parts of *Medium Raw*--more of a collection of essays than a streamlined narrative--that seemed to grow out of that celebrity, such as Bourdain's feuds with food critics and celebrity chefs, impressed reviewers the least. But they still found much to savor, particularly Bourdain's biting personality, his own humorous self-deprecation, his ability to bring out the unknown elements of the restaurant industry, particularly the kitchen and service staff who might otherwise be ignored, and, not least of all, the well-written (if often vulgar) and compelling stories. In the end, though *Medium*

Raw will best be appreciated by foodies, it is "generally an entertaining read, compelling more for [Bourdain's] passion than his mean streak" (Kansas City Star).

Bourdain, who broke into the collective food consciousness with *Kitchen Confidential* (2000) and has since cemented his place as one of our foremost food commentators, offers the kind of book you can write only if you've achieved the level of fame at which you can assume that people care about about whatever you have to say (which they do, and should): a loose, sometimes repetitive, always entertaining, and even at times enlightening collection of food-related ramblings and name-naming hit-pieces. The result is more or less the book equivalent of finding yourself sharing plates at a communal table with a chatty, witty, unapologetically profane, knowledgeable and well-connected member-observer of the restaurant big leagues. If, like him, you see the world's greatest chefs as somewhere between rock and porn stars, there's no way you wouldn't spend hours listening to him chew your ear off with stories of that coke-fueled weekend (or was it a month?) trapped on an island with the world's most insufferably wealthy food posers and with diatribes on how annoying Alice Waters is and how critic Alan Richman is a "douchebag" (the nicer of the two things Bourdain calls him) for trashing the New Orleans food scene with the city still reeling from Katrina and then turn on a dime to deliver an impassioned ode to Vietnamese pho and an admiring portrait of perhaps the world's finest fish-portioner at Le Bernardin. It might have been a narcissistic, condescending, and overly insiderish collection if it weren't for Bourdain's consistently disarming self-awareness that he's "the very picture of the jaded, overprivileged foodie" (in the worst sense of that word) that he used to despise. On seeing himself through the eyes of a hungry young chef who still has to actually cook just to barely survive, he says, "Look at me and my nice fucking jacket, standing there all famous and shit. Sure, others may cook better than he does, but no one can dish like he can. --Ian Chipman

First off, it should go without saying that people love Anthony Bourdain. His ineffable command of language drives the reader onwards making no attempt to soften the message nor dumb-down the Chef jargon. Bourdain speaks from his heart and speaks about what he knows, and he knows chefs. He knows what good food is and what good food isn't. He's a rogue, a "devil may care" romantic with a clear disdain for application of doing anything in life without passion. He pulls no punches when expressing his opinion about any dining experience whether friend or foe and in doing so

likely upset a lot of people in the industry. With a brute force he manages to shine an amiable light on his perceived villains in a manner that still displays a redeeming respect. I could go on and on about the many virtues of this book and Anthony Bourdain himself but if you got this far into my review chances are you are already familiar. A great 5 hour read with many whimsical trappings.

Honestly, I don't know why I read Bourdain's books ... he is smug and smarmy and uses the curmudgeon role to do all the things we all wish we could do with our lives. But damn, he is a good writer. It is clear that he paid as close attention in English class as he did in culinary school because Tony writes with the same talent that he used to cook (apparently). Blending true life with a touch of novella, Tony weaves a tapestry of interesting stories and tales about travel, life and the culinary world. A true sequel, it does mention what has become of some of the characters he last left in the pages of his break out book, Kitchen Confidential. My favorite chapters were the early ones ... especially his chapter about an ex-girlfriend who was rich, spoiled and sociopathic ... which I've experienced more times than I'd care to. I felt that some of the chapters rambled a bit, especially the two chapter long take on Momofuku and it's temperamental chef owner. I honestly had to skip the rest of the chapter several pages into it because it was just going nowhere and was pretty much a flowery tribute that Marc Anthony would have called 'over the top'. I do love Tony's use of prose and cursing ... it makes the book entertaining and after a while the curmudgeon thing starts to get grating and it's almost like Tony reads your mind and switches to humble mode for a page or two. This is a guy who plays the whole 'I can't believe I am famous!' card and means it ... but at the same time, he knows how amazing his life turned out to be and how jealous most of the readers are about his many travels, riches and fame. I see this book not as a literary work of art but more of a combination of a way to pad the bank account and get some free stream of conscious therapy by Tony. This book skips around like a .22 caliber bullet at close range. It seems like there is no real organization ... a few funny personal stories, followed by a list of Tony's most influential restauranters, a rehash of Kitchen Confidential and then a detailed self personality analysis. Seems like the type of book that someone bangs out in a week because the advance has already been spent and the deadline is getting closer. Not to say that each word isn't agonized over because it is clear that Tony is a wordsmith of the utmost magnitude. But don't expect more than it is, which is stream of consciousness Hunter S. Thompson style gonzo/rebel musings.

This book is one third beautiful food prose, one third autobiography, and one third therapy session. This is a solid offering from Bourdain, but suffers from occasional confusion about its overarching

thesis. One moment he's describing the taste of a raw oyster, one moment he's pouring his (apparently damaged) heart out to you about his deep personal issues. Some of Bourdain's best food writing can be found here, but the book lacks a coherent structure and theme to tie it together. I firmly believe that in 100 years, people will still be reading Bourdain- and they'll look at this book as a transitional offering between a young, angry Tony and an older, refined, more nuanced writer and personality.

Anthony Bourdain seems to be a "love him or hate him" personality. Over the years I've read many criticisms of him, saying that he's egotistical, "wasn't a great chef", tries too hard to come across as a "bad boy", among other things. I find his books to be very honest and open, and his tv shows in general are excellent, but don't always have the same opportunity to present how he really feels. Which in my mind is fine - tv is a different medium and he likely has much different expectations put on him by the network. Personally, I don't think he really tries to cultivate any particular image and I think he brings a tremendous amount of insight, sensitivity, empathy and eagerness to explore and understand other cultures in a genuine way, not just what will look good for the cameras (or to the reader, as it were). I think he's an excellent writer, as well. He's not afraid to wax poetic, go into lyrical prose to describe something of beauty, or to call himself on his own BS. This book is the spiritual successor to *Kitchen Confidential* (one of my favorite books of all time). It is a series of semi-unrelated essays on various topics - one of which is the best description/justification/explanation of "selling out" I've ever seen. (He says he arrived at this conclusion after discussing the topic with Emeril - one of his former targets of scorn). You get insights into the food industry, great meals he's had, life at The Food Network (where his original "A Cook's Tour" was shown), cooking as a profession, food writers, and fine dining in general, among other things. If you don't like Bourdain, this won't change your mind about anything, most likely. If you already like him, then this is just more of his view on things, and you'll probably enjoy it. He's crass and profane, so be aware that this is him, uncensored. (Just in case you haven't read his books before). To me this is a better book than *The Nasty Bits*, which I liked just fine, but it felt more disjointed, being a collection of previously published essays - at least I think they were all previously published. As I said, I really enjoy AB's writing. Though he can be vulgar, sure, he is also capable of elegant descriptive prose and he's particularly good at delving into topics beyond surface expectations or preconceptions. What I also like about this book is that AB reassesses his past, his prior views on various things, *Kitchen Confidential*, his career and his previously-stated views on others. He's not trying to live up to an image at this point and has come to realize that there are

more important things in life. He also repeatedly states how lucky he is and how blessed his life has been, considering the dark corners he'd previously inhabited. Recommended highly. I can't wait for the next one.

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