

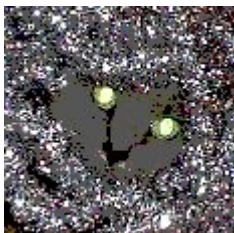
than something that holds together as a coherent whole. Entries are annoyingly brief, sometimes at the expense of including what would have been more detailed and interesting information, and they are apparently written on a sixth grade level. I understand the need for such a writing style in a reference work for the general public, but this style also makes it difficult to sit down and read *The Complete Idiot's Guide* as a book. The formatting further hampers such a reading. Like many textbooks, *The Complete Idiot's Guide* includes at least one boxed window on each page. These windows, which highlight interesting facts or summarize key information, would be fine if the book were a useable reference work. But for someone attempting to read this guide from cover to cover, they're annoying distractions competing for attention.

As I said earlier, I don't blame Jay Stevenson for these problems. All of the Complete Idiot's Guides are similarly formatted and written. Perhaps someday he can take the information included in his guide and write something along the lines of Paul Barber's *Vampires, Burial and Death* or Raymond T. Mc Nally and Radu Florescu's *In Search of Dracula*, two excellent books about vampires that both serve as useful reference tools AND can be read from cover to cover with pleasure.

Necropsy: The Review of Horror Fiction, Volume IV (Winter 2002)

Nosferatu for Knuckleheads: A Review of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Vampires*

by June Pulliam



Stevenson, Jay. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Vampires*. Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books, 2002. 314 p.

Generally, I'm a fan of books that a) take a large and sometimes difficult subject and make it accessible to laypeople and b) are about often neglected subjects, such as horror or vampires. Thus I was delighted to find *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Vampires*. I had such high hopes for this book, thinking that it would serve as an introduction to a big topic for lay readers and as a useful quick reference for everyone. Alas, this book does neither.

It's not that Jay Stevenson doesn't know his subject matter. He has managed to pack an impressive amount of material in a mere 314 pages, and has even included an index, a rare thing today, since publishers require writers to either make their own indexes or deduct money from author royalties to pay a professional indexer (no wonder that sometimes publishers and writers often choose to forgo the index entirely). Rather, the fault lies with the Complete Idiot series itself.

The name of the book suggests that this is a reference work, something anyone can pick up and leaf through to find exactly what s/he is looking for with little trouble, rather than something meant to be read from cover to cover. But the book's formatting thwarts any attempts by the reader to go in and out quickly and find a specific piece of information. For a reference work to be useful, it must be broken into predictable segments headed by descriptive subtitles. Instead, the editors of The Complete Idiot's Series have opted for cute and catchy titles instead of those boring old headings that actually tell the reader what follows in a given chapter. For example, someone looking for information about Elizabeth Bathory wouldn't find flipping through the book very helpful, as the title above her entry reads "Bloodbath Beth." It would've been useful if the editors at least included descriptive subtitles after their more fanciful ones. I guess it's fortunate that the author at least included an index to direct the hapless reader to specific areas of the text.

Even more annoying, the editing and formatting of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Vampires* makes it difficult to sit down and read the book from cover to cover. While the subtitles do not facilitate casual browsing, the text of the book itself is written more like a reference work, rather