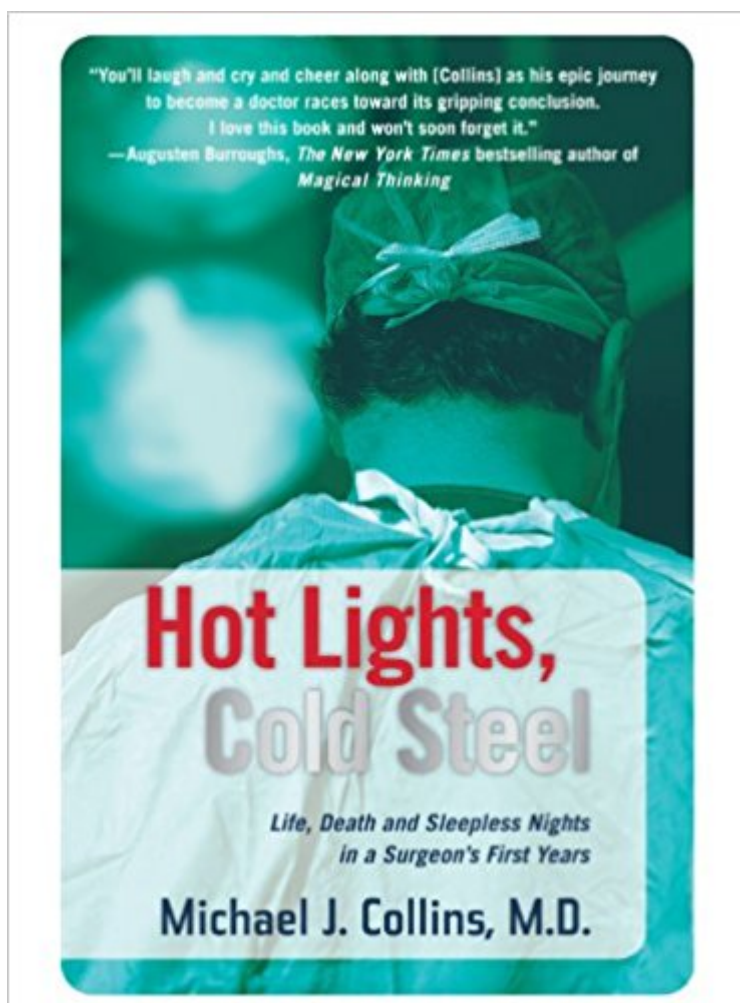


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# Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death And Sleepless Nights In A Surgeon's First Years



## Synopsis

When Michael Collins decides to become a surgeon, he is totally unprepared for the chaotic life of a resident at a major hospital. A natural overachiever, Collins' success, in college and medical school led to a surgical residency at one of the most respected medical centers in the world, the famed Mayo Clinic. But compared to his fellow residents Collins feels inadequate and unprepared. All too soon, the euphoria of beginning his career as an orthopedic resident gives way to the feeling he is a counterfeit, an imposter who has infiltrated a society of brilliant surgeons. This story of Collins' four-year surgical residency traces his rise from an eager but clueless first-year resident to accomplished Chief Resident in his final year. With unparalleled humor, he recounts the disparity between people's perceptions of a doctor's glamorous life and the real thing: a succession of run down cars that are towed to the junk yard, long weekends moonlighting at rural hospitals, a family that grows larger every year, and a laughable income. Collins' good nature helps him over some of the rough spots but cannot spare him the harsh reality of a doctor's life. Every day he is confronted with decisions that will change people's lives-or end them-forever. A young boy's leg is mangled by a tractor: risk the boy's life to save his leg, or amputate immediately? A woman diagnosed with bone cancer injures her hip: go through a painful hip operation even though she has only months to live? Like a jolt to the system, he is faced with the reality of suffering and death as he struggles to reconcile his idealism and aspiration to heal with the recognition of his own limitations and imperfections. Unflinching and deeply engaging, *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* is a humane and passionate reminder that doctors are people too. This is a gripping memoir, at times devastating, others triumphant, but always compulsively readable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Collins begins this personal chronicle with an account of a choice he had to make between amputating a 14-year-old boy's leg and saving the limb at a greater risk to the boy's life. (He amputated the leg.) This dilemma came at the conclusion of Collins's grueling four years of residency at the Mayo Clinic, culminating in his appointment as chief resident in orthopedic surgery. Now in practice in Illinois, he details, with admirable humor and insight, the early, virtually sleepless years when he learned not only to perfect his craft but to come to terms with the emotional impact of causing pain and losing patients. Collins brings to life the dramatic moments when he made his first, terrifying incision and hand-drilled a traction pin into a weeping six-year-old's leg. Collins and his wife, Patti, wanted a large family, but the economic strain of having three children in three years (they eventually had 12) forced him to moonlight every other weekend at rural hospitals. There are moving passages about his love for Patti and the bonds he developed with other residents, and empathetic evocations of those he treats. Collins describes powerfully how he came to understand that his calling was not just to develop as a skilled surgical technician, but to treat his patients humanely as individuals. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** If he didn't feel overwhelmed before the Mayo Clinic senior orthopedic surgery resident lobbed a beeper at him with the nonchalant order, "Cover for me," 29-year-old ex-cabdriver, ex-construction worker, and, at the time, brand-new resident Collins certainly did then. It was his first day on the job, and instantly he began fielding calls from staff nurses requesting orders for patients he hadn't laid eyes on. If it hadn't been for his innate sense of humor--brilliantly demonstrated in this memoir of his Mayo residency--and a sense of perspective derived from that experience, he might have failed. He didn't, and here he honors those who helped him along the way and those whom he helped. As a man who recognizes that he, too, makes his living with his hands, Collins anguishes over the options available to a carpenter who had severed four fingers. After assisting at a young cancer patient's leg amputation, only to learn later that she had died within months, anyway, he agonizes over what drew him to his profession in the first place and what could possibly keep him on course. "I wanted to be the guy who confronted the arbitrariness of life and strangled the unfairness out of it." Instead, while honing his craft, he learned from a Vietnam vet

that the main thing patients deserve is compassion. If Collins' scalpel is as sharp as his pen, his patients are in capable hands, indeed. Donna ChavezCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Skip the Kindle version and buy the paperback or hardback. The Kindle version is riddled with typos and (presumably) digital conversion errors. If I were the author, I would be appalled that my publisher deemed this acceptable. When I complained to , they suggested I send them a detailed list of all the errors. I bought the book for \$9.99 and they would like me to do the proofreading as well? Although this is the worst book I have come across in terms of errors (I would never buy another digital book published by St. Martin's Press), other Kindle books are similarly poorly edited and much of my initial enthusiasm for this medium has been dampened by the poor quality.

Interesting book on surviving a medical residency in orthopedics at the Mayo Clinic, but I've read better residency memoirs. This author's account is a little stiff and stilted. I don't know when this book was written, and I'm not a medical professional, but it seems outdated. The old boys' network is in it's full glory here because none of the doctors or residents mentioned are women. A more honest, fresh, and updated account -- and much funnier, too -- is a memoir by Salvatore Iaquinta, M.D., called "The Year THEY Tried To Kill Me, ..." about his internship year. This book's Kindle price is much cheaper, too. Overall, a better read and value.

Michael Collins is a born story-teller. It doesn't matter if you aren't interested in medicine or if you don't intend on becoming a surgeon. Collins is not here for that. He does not fill his book with medical jargon or complex diagrams. He doesn't go into long descriptions as to how the body works. Collins does not focus on the minutia of his career, but rather, how it has impacted him and his life. It is not simply a tale of a surgeon going through his residency. It's a memoir of a man's coming of age and his indomitable will. It's a testament towards human suffering, human imperfection, and Collins' journey that despite all of this, he must endure and prevail. Collins' good natured humor does not mesh well with the rigors and sadness of his everyday losses. He tip-toes the wire of life and death with a crack whip wit and a challenged sense of compassion. The reader will laugh at the everyday absurdity of his life, feel uplifted by his victories and growing skill as a surgeon, and will feel their heart utterly break as Collins mourns the death of his patients. His pain is real, and it bleeds through the prose. It is clear that Collins poured his soul and mind into writing this book, and it shows. This is not a tale of someone hoping to shine the light on the medical profession, or show what being a

surgeon is like. Collins is past that. Instead, he writes a book that details his journey from a wide-eyed medical student into a hardened chief resident, and the effect it has had on his psyche. You will laugh, you will cry, but ultimately, this book is unforgettable. It is touching, uplifting, and heart-breaking, and I will never forget reading it.

My wife will be starting her residency in July of 2016 (gen surg) and as a diligent husband, try to become more knowledgeable with what she has in her future (the medical field fascinates me as well). I was very impressed with how the book was written and the stories it told. I believe that there are many points in the book that are applicable to anyone, not just students looking at ortho or even medical students as a whole. I appreciated how he tied his family and friends into the story, as well as the physicians and caretakers at the hospital. Helping my wife study through the past few years did help me in reading this. There were terms here and there that I would have had to look up if it were not for that (Anencephaly stumped me, now I know).

I bought this book owing to my interest in attending medical school. I also read Blue Collar Blue Scrubs by Collins. Reading both books is not in my opinion overkill - they are not repetitive and each provides a different outlook on a different time in his life. It is not mandatory to read one before the other. The story is detailed but flows quickly along and is actually kind of hard to put down because what Collins did is so impressive. While I really enjoyed the book for the insight into the process and journey of becoming an MD that it provided it doesn't feel like a report - it flows quickly along in story form.

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