



A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius

By Dave Eggers

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National Bestseller

The literary sensation of the year, a book that redefines both family and narrative for the twenty-first century. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is the moving memoir of a college senior who, in the space of five weeks, loses both of his parents to cancer and inherits his eight-year-old brother. Here is an exhilarating debut that manages to be simultaneously hilarious and wildly inventive as well as a deeply heartfelt story of the love that holds a family together.

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A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius By Dave Eggers Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #9422 in Books
- Brand: Random House Inc
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Dave Eggers is a terrifically talented writer; don't hold his cleverness against him. What to make of a book called *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius: Based on a True Story*? For starters, there's a good bit of staggering genius before you even *get* to the true story, including a preface, a list of "Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of This Book," and a 20-page acknowledgements section complete with special mail-in offer, flow chart of the book's themes, and a lovely pen-and-ink drawing of a stapler (helpfully labeled "Here is a drawing of a stapler:").

But on to the true story. At the age of 22, Eggers became both an orphan and a "single mother" when his parents died within five months of one another of unrelated cancers. In the ensuing sibling division of labor, Dave is appointed unofficial guardian of his 8-year-old brother, Christopher. The two live together in semi-squalor, decaying food and sports equipment scattered about, while Eggers worries obsessively about child-welfare authorities, molesting babysitters, and his own health. His child-rearing strategy swings between making his brother's upbringing manically fun and performing bizarre developmental experiments on him. (Case in point: his idea of suitable bedtime reading is John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.)

The book is also, perhaps less successfully, about being young and hip and out to conquer the world (in an ironic, media-savvy, Gen-X way, naturally). In the early '90s, Eggers was one of the founders of the very funny *Might Magazine*, and he spends a fair amount of time here on *Might*, the hipster culture of San Francisco's South Park, and his own efforts to get on to MTV's *Real World*. This sort of thing doesn't age very well--but then, Eggers knows that. There's no criticism you can come up with that he hasn't put into *A.H.W.O.S.G.* already. "The book thereafter is kind of uneven," he tells us regarding the contents after page 109, and while that's true, it's still uneven in a way that is funny and heartfelt and *interesting*.

All this self-consciousness could have become unbearably arch. It's a testament to Eggers's skill as a writer--and to the heartbreaking particulars of his story--that it doesn't. Currently the editor of the footnote-and-marginalia-intensive journal *McSweeney's* (the last issue featured an entire story by David Foster Wallace printed tiny on its spine), Eggers comes from the most media-saturated generation in history--so much so that he can't feel an emotion without the sense that it's already been felt *for* him. What may seem like postmodern noodling is really just Eggers writing about pain in the only honest way available to him. Oddly enough, the effect is one of complete sincerity, and--especially in its concluding pages--this memoir as metafiction is affecting beyond all rational explanation. --*Mary Park*

From Publishers Weekly

Literary self-consciousness and technical invention mix unexpectedly in this engaging memoir by Eggers, editor of the literary magazine *McSweeney's* and the creator of a satiric 'zine called *Might*, who subverts the conventions of the memoir by questioning his memory, motivations and interpretations so thoroughly that the form itself becomes comic. Despite the layers of ironic hesitation, the reader soon discerns that the emotions informing the book are raw and, more importantly, authentic. After presenting a self-effacing set of "Rules and Suggestions for the Enjoyment of this Book" ("Actually, you might want to skip much of the middle, namely pages 209-301") and an extended, hilarious set of acknowledgments (which include an itemized account of his gross and net book advance), Eggers describes his parents' horrific deaths from cancer within a few weeks of each other during his senior year of college, and his decision to move with his eight year-old brother, Toph, from the suburbs of Chicago to Berkeley, near where his sister, Beth, lives. In California, he manages to care for Toph, work at various jobs, found *Might*, and even take a star turn on

MTV's *The Real World*. While his is an amazing story, Eggers, now 29, mainly focuses on the ethics of the memoir and of his behavior--his desire to be loved because he is an orphan and admired for caring for his brother versus his fear that he is attempting to profit from his terrible experiences and that he is only sharing his pain in an attempt to dilute it. Though the book is marred by its ending--an unsuccessful parody of teenage rage against the cruel world--it will still delight admirers of structural experimentation and Gen-Xers alike. Agent, Elyse Cheney, Sanford Greenberger Assoc.; 7-city author tour. (Feb.)
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From *Library Journal*

It's a good guess that Jedediah Purdy, the author of *For Common Things* and righteous agitator against irony, would hate Eggers and his late satirical magazine, *Might*, right along with this masterly memoir. That is a shame because, despite Eggers's inability to take anything seriously on its surface, this meandering story rests on a foundation of sincerity that is part of Purdy's rallying cry. Amid countless digressions, Eggers relates two tales: his mostly successful, if unconventional attempt at raising his much younger brother following their parents' deaths and his years founding and then witnessing the slow demise of *Might*. Throughout, Eggers eschews any contrivance. The expected tales of emotional longing, political alienation, and creative struggle by a smart twentysomething are replaced by a stream of hilarious, how-it-happened anecdotes; often inane, how-we-really-talk dialog; and quick jabs at some of our society's bizarre conventions. In the end one is left with a surprisingly moving tale of family bonding and resilience as well as the nagging suspicion that maybe he made the whole thing up. In any case, as compared with the spate of recent reminiscences by earnest youngsters, Eggers delivers a worthwhile story told in perfect pitch to the material. Highly recommended for public and undergraduate libraries.

-A Eric Bryant, "*Library Journal*"

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eric Beckman:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be update about what going on or facts even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know what type you should start with. This *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Sean Mills:

Now a day people that Living in the era where everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources within it can be true or not call for people to be aware of each facts they get. How individuals to be smart in acquiring any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Looking at a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information especially this *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* book because this book offers you rich facts and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you probably know this.

Lorene Williamson:

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John Coffin:

A lot of people said that they feel weary when they reading a publication. They are directly felt that when they get a half areas of the book. You can choose the book A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius to make your own reading is interesting. Your personal skill of reading skill is developing when you similar to reading. Try to choose basic book to make you enjoy you just read it and mingle the sensation about book and looking at especially. It is to be first opinion for you to like to open up a book and examine it. Beside that the publication A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius can to be your brand-new friend when you're truly feel alone and confuse with the information must you're doing of that time.

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