



Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood

Rose George

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An eye-opening exploration of blood, the lifegiving substance with the power of taboo, the value of diamonds, and the promise of breakthrough science

Blood carries life, yet the sight of it makes people faint. It is a waste product and a commodity pricier than oil. It can save lives and transmit deadly infections. Each one of us has roughly nine pints of it, yet many don't even know their own blood type. And for all its ubiquity, the few tablespoons of blood discharged by 800 million women are still regarded as taboo; menstruation is perhaps the single most demonized biological event.

Rose George, author of *The Big Necessity*, is renowned for her intrepid work on topics that are invisible but vitally important. In *Nine Pints*, she takes us from ancient practices of bloodletting to modern "hemovigilance" teams that track blood-borne diseases. She introduces Janet Vaughan, who set up the world's first system of mass blood donation during the Blitz, and Arunachalam Muruganantham, known as "Menstrual Man" for his work on sanitary pads for developing countries. She probes the lucrative business of plasma transfusions, in which the U.S. is known as the "OPEC of plasma." And she looks to the future, as researchers seek to bring synthetic blood to a hospital near you.

Spanning science and politics, stories and global epidemics, *Nine Pints* reveals our life's blood in an entirely new light.

Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood Details

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Author : Rose George

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From Reader Review Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood for online ebook

Lane says

Chapter 1 - My Pint
Chapter 2 - That Most Singular and Valuable Reptile
Chapter 3 - Janet and Percy
Chapter 4 - Blood Borne
Chapter 5 - The Yellow Stuff
Chapter 6 - Rotting Pickles
Chapter 7 - Nasty Cloths
Chapter 8 - Code Red
Chapter 9 - Blood Like Guinness: The Future

This book talks about the nine pints of human blood we have in each of us, adults at least. Though most of the content is focused around the medical uses of blood, it also takes the cultural perspective on how blood, in certain contexts, can be either sacred or profane.

For example, chapters 6 and 7 are centered around cultural views of menstruation. The author focuses mostly on the views of it in India, where due to long-standing religious tradition and poor education, is seen as taboo. Due to this stance, women and girls do not get adequate reproductive education nor easy access to feminine hygiene products. Here, due to context, blood is seen as wrong.

The first three chapters are on the history and processes of blood transfusions, voluntary and paid blood donation, the use of donated blood to save lives, and how all of that got started, both from the historical and medical side.

Also leeches. That's a fun chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 are about blood-transmitted diseases like HIV and the problems that occur with blood that has not been screened for pathogens that gets used on people anyway.

Chapter 8 takes place for the most part in an emergency room. It talks about how vital blood is to our bodies, what it does to our bodies when it's there and when it isn't.

Chapter 9 is a bit of a catch-all. Yes, there are vampires in this one. But she also mentions experiments with blood revitalization (injecting blood from a younger person into an older one), the Jehovah's Witnesses rule of not getting transfusions, blood experiments and the possible new blood technologies of the (hopefully near) future.

I very briefly summarized the chapters, there's a lot more to each. Overall this was a great read, I highly recommend it. It was very, very informative about blood in a non-technical, layman's style way, as well as rather funny at times, similar to the style of author Mary Roach (Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers). I ended up finding this book a lot more interesting than I thought I would, I learned a lot.

Thank you Rose George, great book.

Jennifer says

Nine Pints consists of nine unconnected chapters, besides all being related to blood in some way. Maybe it's because I listened to *Nine Pints* on audio, but not having an introductory chapter introducing the topics and why they were chosen left me a bit unmoored and confused at times. The chapters weren't in chronological order and there didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to how they were organized. This always frustrates me when I encounter it in nonfiction. I like structure and I have DNF'ed books in the past when there is no structure. The fact that I didn't DNF *Nine Pints* says something as to how excited I was for this book since most of the topics that I found fascinating ended up coming in the later chapters. The chapters on AIDS, trauma, and menstruation were truly fascinating and were the ones that resonated with me the most. There were also chapters concerning what happens to your blood after you donate, the history of the blood donation system (paid vs. volunteer), leeches, etc. Less fascinating, at least to me, but still interesting. I only realized when going to write my review that *Nine Pints* was written by Rose George. I read one of her other books, "99 Percent of Everything: Inside Shipping, the Invisible Industry Which Puts Clothes on Your Back, Gas in Your Car, and Food on Your Plate" several years ago and it was really good. I don't remember that book being as unstructured, so I'm not certain what happened here. Overall, *Nine Pints* is worth reading and I found it enjoyable.

Rita Ciresi says

Nine Pints is less an overview of blood (as promised by the opening chapter) and more a collection of essays on diverse topics relating to blood. Some are more interesting than others, but all are informative and tinged with a dry humor that makes Rose George the UK's answer to her more raucous American counterpart, Mary Roach. I admire the way both authors write about complex medical issues for a lay audience.

Linda says

The author is British, so the book starts out describing blood banking in Britain, and about Janet Vaughan, the woman who basically started blood banking. There's a chapter on leeches and bloodletting, both the history, and current uses today. Another chapter discusses HIV in South Africa, which seemed oddly irrelevant. Canadian for-profit blood banks, trauma surgery, vampires, and menstrual blood are all discussed. I found the stereotyping of Americans ("the Canadian border official has been taking demeanor lessons from the Americans. He is icy, underwhelming, as solid as his shape") annoying. On the whole, I was quite disappointed in this book.

Stuart says

'For Homer, blood had a power as fierce and invisible as electricity: a mouthful of blood, a switch flicked, and Anticlea could now speak to her son. Of course Homer was awed by blood. There is nothing like it. It is stardust and sea. The iron in our blood comes from the deaths of supernovas, like all the iron on our planet. This bright red liquid – brighter in the arteries, when transporting oxygen around the body from the heart, duller in the veins, when it is not – contains salt and water, like the sea we possibly came from.'

Nine Pints is Rose George's account of humanity's current understanding of our precious and irreplaceable

(and expensive) life giving liquid: blood. George travels the world to see first hand how much we truly know about blood; both inside and outside of the body. *Nine Pints* is a journal of the medicine, history and investigations into practices surrounding blood (both revolutionary and demeaning) and our dependence on its importance.

Rose George is a vivid, enthusiastic and bold writer who wants to see progress in every aspect of blood culture. Getting into the science, medicine, politics, different ideologies, nature, history, racism/sexism and global implications behind our need for blood. From leech farms in wales, the NHSBT and open heart surgery to blood letting, haematology and the ill treatment of menstruating women (I reckon RG could write a whole book on this subject). Rose George explores the people behind the revolutionary jumps in handling blood, breaking taboos and dealing with tragedy. The women (shout out to Janet Maria Vaughan) and men who did everything they could to make blood medicine what it is today.

I was shocked and unsettled at some approaches to blood in the world; RG's observations stick in my mind and make me wish more than ever for a better world without corruption, sexism and poverty. I was amazed by how complex and intricate blood science has become and where it could take us in the very near future (synthetic blood?). Not only is George factual and informative but she is also personal, worldly and insightful. Taking the time to see the circumstances and the stories behind the statistics. Walking among those affected by limitations, governments and biology when it comes to the blood they need to survive or evolutionary functions people have no control over.

I was expecting to feel squeamish or weirded out when reading about blood but RG did a great job of being admirably descriptive, respectful and honest (not playing up the 'disturbing' factor, I bet the disgustologists weren't happy). George's almost encyclopedic approach to writing about our understanding of blood culture and medicine is exquisitely overwhelming. The sheer depth and quantity of information is outstanding but too much for one read. This is meant to be read multiple times as there is plenty to glean from returning to this text.

Personally it was too much at once, I almost decided at 40 pages to stop reading as I could feel myself getting overladen with information. I continued as I was enjoying the read but I still stand firm that George's comprehensive nature might stop a few people in their tracks. That is not to diminish the quality or importance of this read, George has essentially written the most up to date, comprehensive overview of humanity's understanding and interaction with blood that has been published in recent years. I would go as far as saying that this is the most immersed in blood I have ever been. (That came out wrong...). Blood is miraculous and people do amazing things with it every day.

If you want to understand what has happened, what is happening and what will happen in the future of our use of blood, then I highly recommend reading *Nine Pints*. Rose George is a thorough and memorable writer who appreciates research as much as she does the human condition. I feel like I understand so much more about the world's reliance on blood and how we can all participate and commit more to saving the lives of those who need help. You never know when you may need blood to save your life or the life of someone you care about, so giving it is the best way to make sure there is enough to go around.

Jan says

I have been an RN since forever and have worked in an assortment of acute, rehab, and chronic care settings, so my views are not unbiased nor uninformed. Perhaps if I give one example from each chapter it might be useful to those who speak medicalese and those who don't.

1. The changing understanding of blood though millennia including the relatively recent divisions of typing,

and the development of blood storage and accessibility.

2. The medical use of leeches from antiquity to the present well past the time of blades or scarification such as brought about the demise of former President Washington.
3. The incredible contributions of Dame Janet Maria Vaughan of the women's college at Oxford in the mid twentieth century.
4. The greatest cause of HIV/AIDS around the world is donating blood in Africa and Southeast Asia.
5. The treatment perils for hemophilia. I value the people mentioned, but am very unhappy that Arthur Ashe went unmentioned even though he came from the country whose pharmaceutical companies denied culpability in the deaths of so many unique people.
6. The practices of derision and blame placed upon women in many countries which also have almost no clean water or sanitary facilities simply because the women are having menstrual bleeding.
7. Beginning with the man who endured verbal abuse from nearly everyone while researching the manufacture and distribution of affordable sanitary napkins and tampons in India and developing nations where women could not afford them and were forced to use some methods from antiquity.
8. Trauma Medicine in civilian hospitals and in war areas and the changes in the use of blood and blood products.
9. The history of vampirism and the search for synthetic products as well as blood as a fountain of youth.

There is an extensive bibliography following these chapters.

I found it to be well written, educational, and enjoyable.

I requested and received a free ebook copy from Metropolitan Books courtesy of NetGalley. Thank you!

Angie says

This is a set of 9 rather unconnected essays on topics related to blood, some of which are great and others of which are okay. I'm really glad I read it; I learned a lot and some of it was incredibly interesting. I was a little disappointed with the organization. George clearly could have written a great book, but this one stops short of that. She has a habit of interrupting a story to drop us in the middle of another, at the juiciest moment in the middle and then going back and filling us in. She reaches for the strangest tidbit to start every anecdote, not just at the beginning of each essay but repeatedly whenever she wants to introduce a new setting or person, and the result is confusing and frustrating, although it did get rather comical for me after a while. The book would benefit so much from some organization, explanation of where she's going and what she's trying to do, and connective narration, rather than all the jumping around. It's just so close to being a great book. It could have gotten there but she's working so hard at being shocking that she doesn't manage to be a good explainer.

Okay, so the organization is bad, but the material that's there, and the extensive research that went into writing this book. And there are times when her voice as a narrator is downright funny and made me laugh aloud. I'm really glad I read this. And I hope she gets an editor to help her with organization, because I think she's capable of doing great things.

I got a copy to review from Net Galley.

David says

Q. Explain why you believe that reading this book makes you a fine example of enlightened modern

manhood.

A. It has two longish chapters about largely about menstruation, a topic which is not, as the cool kids say nowadays, in my wheelhouse.

Q. What do you want, some kind of medal?

A. Yes, please, and a certificate with a red ribbon, attached with a grommet. And an ice-cream sundae, too, because there was also a chapter on leeches.

I enjoyed this book but believe that people without sufficient knowledge of British culture might find the barrage of UK-specific information a little difficult to comprehend. While hardly an expert myself, I had the good fortune to live in England a long while ago, and, despite the intervening years, acquired enough knowledge to avoid frequent trips to the Google while reading.

Among my fellow colonials, the amount of knowledge of British culture varies wildly, especially as people who have never set foot in the Scepter'd Isle have sometimes consumed an impressive amount of *Downton Abbey* and *Call the Midwife*. I propose the following one-question test to determine if you, a non-British person, have sufficient cultural knowledge to enjoy this book. (It represents only one of the many potentially baffling culture references in the book, but I feel that this particular bit of information can stand in for the whole.)

Question: What qualities are often associated with the stereotypical Yorkshire-person?

In case you want to know the answer, a search by keywords "stereotypical Yorkshireman" (sorry ladies) will get you many opinions. The best single short answer, I thought, was here.

If you can answer this question correctly, then you, a non-British person, can enjoy this book. Otherwise, the experience might be a little like listening to people gossip about someone you don't know.

New topic: there is some disagreement on the Internet about how much blood a person actually has, but I am going with the many websites that say between 8 and 12 pints. I will assume that the population is distributed along a so-called "normal curve", with the average at 10 pints, and perhaps 2/3rds of the population between 9 and 11 pints. Photos of the author show a somewhat diminutive British lady, so when she decided to use nine pints as the amount of blood she was lugging around, I think she came by this number honestly. On the other hand, if I had written this book, I probably would have had to think of two more blood-related topics to write chapter-length essay/investigations about. This is only another example of how short people, in spite of the impressive amount of complaining that often can be heard in the proximity of their tiny little bodies, get off easy.

Another new topic: I am always search for a book that hits the sweet spot where intellectually stimulating overlaps with serenity. At first, I thought this was a book that was going to firmly occupy that spot in the Venn diagram, as there is a nice calming chapter about how, generally speaking, a fairly well-organized program of volunteer blood donation became the norm in most developed countries and beyond. It seems that some people with the right idea at the right time were able to advance what, in retrospect, seems a completely reasonable and obvious system. They overcame institutional conservatism and apathy to make the right thing happen. Isn't that nice? Calming, right? Evidence that, occasionally, the whole world doesn't completely suck, right? I love books like that.

Well, it turns out we are just being set up for a sucker punch to the gut. And I mean that as a compliment. The blood business is apparently awash (best not to think about that image too much) with dirty dealing, bureaucratic oafishness, and people's lives being ruined so that somebody far away can make a dirty buck. As is often the case in situations like this, my fellow Americans are in the vanguard. As usual, I wondered how people like this can sleep at night, but then again the groaning non-prescription sleep-aid shelf at my

local pharmacy probably supplies an adequate answer.

Later, the heat comes off the excesses of wretched capitalism for a while as a chapter explores the lunatic oppression that women on the Indian subcontinent are subjected to because they have the bad judgment to menstruate. In case you, O Westerner, were planning to feel smug and self-satisfied about our superior treatment of the menstruating, hard of the heels of this chapter is another long one (see Q and A above) largely about tampons, in which our own talent for unreasonable behavior comes in for a thorough examination.

The book sometimes reads like a series of long-form journalism articles, connected to each other only that they all have some connection to blood and blood products. I enjoy long-form journalism, so that's OK with me, but your mileage may vary.

I received a free electronic advance review copy of this book via Netgalley and Metropolitan Books, distributed in the USA by Macmillan.

Caroline says

NO SPOILERS

(Full disclosure: book abandoned on page 145 [out of 289 pages].)

Nine pints of blood--or more visually arresting: one gallon plus one pint. That's roughly how much is in the human body. It's facts like these that author Rose George shared in *Nine Pints*--but only in chapter one. There's only so much one can say about blood *itself*.

To fill out a book, George dedicated nine chapters to different sub-topics relating to blood in general. The sub-topics, however, are so disparate that this is, essentially, nine chapters that are the beginnings of nine separate books. To name a few, one chapter is on leeches, another on AIDS/HIV, another on hemophilia. This isn't everyday information, and there's much that's fascinating. Leeches produce an anesthetic superior to anything scientists have been able to create. HIV sufferers now have to take only one pill to manage the illness, not eight, precisely timed pills a day. Knocking a knuckle causes "rush bleeding" in hemophiliacs followed by agonizing, debilitating pain. This is a dense, fact-heavy book that covers a lot of ground.

George obviously was enthusiastic about writing *Nine Pints* and researched each part extensively, but that can work against a science writer who isn't careful. She included too much information and veered off on tangents, sometimes abandoning the topic of blood entirely.

In tone, *Nine Pints* swings from interesting to boring. Interesting sections are sharply focused and flow with a natural effortlessness. Boring sections are overlong, with the human element outweighed by the technical, factual, or historical.

Mary Roach, the cream of the crop among pop science writers, endorsed *Nine Pints* with excessive praise right on the cover. An endorsement from Roach is unsurprising; the topic seems just like one she'd write about. It may be unfair to compare George to Roach, but it's hard not to when George has written about this, and her previous books have been about dirt and human feces. Maybe she wants to emulate Roach or maybe she doesn't, but George can't compare. She lacks Roach's wittiness and gift for making nonfiction science page-turning entertainment. George took the more academic route. In and of itself that's *fine*, but with *Nine Pints*, she wasted an opportunity to do something exciting with a subject many don't want to read about.

Nine Pints is educational for sure, but its drawbacks mean some in-depth articles on this subject would be a better choice.

NOTE: I received this as an advanced reader copy from LibraryThing in August 2018.

Ezgi ?? says

There are not too many books about blood out there. It was an interesting read on that end. I definitely learned about blood and indirectly about leeching, code red, blood storage, menstruation- even vampires. There is a lot we know about blood nowadays, but still a lot to learn: why can't we make blood or save more trauma patients. Many many sad stories on the HIV patients in Africa and the menstruation struggle of young girls and women all around the world. How they are still considered "dirty" for bleeding. USA still has a lot to learn about menstruation too- it is still a taboo. Book offers a good read "If men could menstruate": <https://ww3.haverford.edu/psychology/...>

There are still a lot myths around the blood as well. Many people believe leeching will detox their body. I personally have a problem with the blood donation in the USA. My blood, like many people who lived overseas for some time is not accepted for donation. They say it is due to mad cow disease- which is ridiculous. USA had more cases of mad cow disease than in Turkey.

Blood is part of our culture, history and future. We can learn about it, help understand it better, and donate whenever we can...

Kate Vane says

In *Nine Pints* Rose George does for blood what she did for human waste in *The Big Necessity*. *Nine Pints* covers issues ranging from the birth of the British blood donor service to the history and current state of medicinal leech usage to the politics of menstruation.

She weaves a story around each topic, offering a very readable combination of fact, anecdote, and analysis.

Despite that, I must admit my interest did flag in one or two places. I think when I read *The Big Necessity* it introduced me to a number of topics which I had never considered before, and which I think weren't widely discussed. With *Nine Pints*, much of the material was familiar to me and has featured in mainstream media.

Indian social entrepreneur Arunachalam Muruganantham, aka Pad Man, has received extensive publicity for his efforts to make good sanitary protection available to women (there has even been a movie made about him) and the terrible treatment of haemophiliacs given contaminated blood has been covered in the light of the public inquiry in the UK.

Other things were new though, such as the role of scientist Janet Vaughan, whose work helped make blood transfusion standard practice and was instrumental in the organisation of blood banks during World War 2, and the long and complex life cycle of the leech! More literal chapter headings might have been useful, so that readers could focus on the topics that interest them.

Overall, it's an interesting read and offers a fresh perspective on something that is so familiar we often don't give it much thought.

*

I received a copy of *Nine Pints* from the publisher via Netgalley.
Read more of my reviews on my blog at <https://katevane.com>

Rob Adey says

I wouldn't normally read a book on this topic due to medical phobiaishness, but Rose George is such a good writer I thought I'd risk it (still had to skip a couple of chapters, though). And it's great stuff: lots of info packed into superior prose, with wit and passion (within a few pages I'd signed up to donate blood for the first time).

Rebecca says

Nine Pints dives deep into the science and cultural history of blood. George's journalistic tenacity keeps her pushing through the statistics to find the human stories that animate the book. In the first chapter we track the journey of a pint of blood that she donates in her hometown of Leeds. I was particularly interested, if morbidly so, in the chapter on leeches and bloodletting. Other sections journey further afield, chiefly to South Africa and India, to explore AIDS and menstruation taboos. The style can be choppy and repetitive, given to short sentences and identical paragraph openers, and there are a couple of places where the nine-chapter structure shows its weaknesses. While *Nine Pints* is quite uneven, it does convey a lot of important information about the past, present and future of our relationship to blood.

See my full review at [Shiny New Books](#).

Scott says

I've never read Rose George before (her *Ninety Percent of Everything* came out right as I had started another book also about, basically, shipping containers), but I'll now definitely go back and check out that one and her one about human waste, because *Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood* is terrific. George reminds me of Mary Roach, who I also like (though George is British, adding an additional layer of charm to my ears), in that she's smart, engaging, clear in her thinking, tackles a huge topic in an interesting, coherent way, and combines historical research with in-the-field reporting. She's also really good at the thumbnail character sketch of the people she meets, and can't resist the witty aside, most of which actually are, in fact, funny... even though her subject matter very much often isn't. There's a solid look at bloodletting through the ages and at how leeches are used today. Her history of blood donation is great, especially the portrait of the amazing Janet Vaughan who, among other accomplishments, set up Britain's mass donor system during the Blitz (George has contempt for privatized blood (and plasma) buyers and resellers). Her AIDS report from South Africa, where the disease remains rampant, especially among young poor black women, is as grim as you'd expect. And her lengthy chapter on menstruation and the infuriating stigma and embarrassment still so present, is brilliant, the best chunk of the book. It gets a little too science-y in parts for me, but overall a fun, mostly fascinating read.

Natalie says

Caroline's review, linked below, honestly covered everything I thought about *Nine Pints*, which is why it took me two weeks to finish the thing.

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>
