



# The Sleepyhead's Bedside Companion

*Sean Coughlan*

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Sleep remains one of the most mysterious areas of our lives. We all sleep, maybe not as much as we would like, but it's a universal human experience, as necessary as breathing and as nourishing as eating. But how much do we really know about sleep? What happens in the third of our lives when we're slumbering? How have sleep, dreams and nightmares been interpreted over the centuries? Why do so many people feel that they are deprived of sleep? How did our ancestors use to sleep?

Sleep has its own unexpected and rich story - ranging across science, history, literature and philosophy. It's been a cultural battleground between those who see sleep as a gift from nature and those who have seen it as an idle waste of time.

In an overcrowded, exhausting 24-hour culture, sleep has become a valuable, rationed commodity. It's something that people are thinking about more than ever before.

This bedside-table companion responds to this interest in sleep, providing a mixture of short, browsable pieces and more extended sections. The style is informed, thoughtful and entertaining, in keeping with the subject matter. It is intelligent but playful, quirky and amusing.

Any study of sleep has to savour the delight of the long lie-in, the sexual musk of night time; discuss the history of the bed, the origin of pyjamas and how the Elizabethans saw the pillow as a sign of moral weakness and examine why the Italians called the bed the 'the opera of the poor'.

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