

THE COLLECTORS OF LOST SOULS - TURNING KURU SCIENTISTS INTO WHITEMEN. 2008. By Warwick Anderson. Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press. 318 pages. Price C\$30 approx.

In 1965 while stuck in Port Moresby, a sweltering colonial outpost in the South Pacific, D. Carleton Gajdusek sat brooding on the drama of research into the disease called kuru. The American scientist recognized he was acting in a "vast human comedy of modern man's frailties...in the fantastic setting of a stone-age culture under a horrible plague...and the investigation plagued by sweeping personal involvements which girdle the earth!"

So begins Warwick Anderson's fascinating book on the story of kuru, the Fore (pronounced for'-ay) people and the scientists—some larger than life—who lived with the Fore people, interacted with them, tended to them in their dying moments and finally tracked down the cause of this plague. It is fitting that this volume appears on the book scene at about the time one of the key players in the story—D. Carlton Gajdusek—died at the age of 85 on the 12th of December 2008.

While the book provides a cursory overview of the scientific underpinnings of the kuru story, it presents a fascinating insight into the process of anthropological and medical research that took place, beginning in the post-World War II period in this area of the South Pacific—a time considerably different from our own with respect to research ethics and personal scientific responsibility. The Fore people "knew" that their plague was caused by sorcery. Initially, kuru was thought to be a conversion disorder brought on in people who were convinced someone had cast a spell on them. Later on, it was recognized as a clearly neurological disorder but was felt to have a possible genetic cause. It was only when the research scientists became "medical cannibals" and began to harvest and use brain in their "scientific rituals" that the true story unfolded.

The book can be appreciated on a much deeper level if the reader has some familiarity with Herman Melville's American classic—Moby Dick—another story of "things remote", and Joseph's Conrad's famous books of "journeys of the soul" in exotic parts of the world—Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness. There are many parallels among those great stories and this one.

For a long time, I puzzled over the subtitle: Turning Kuru Scientists into Whitemen. What did it mean? Then I came across a book by Ira Bashow—The Meaning of Whitemen—Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World. Bashow points out that "the whiteman" represents the "...legacy of colonialism, the face of Western modernity, and the force of globalization." In weaving his story, Anderson shows how the kuru scientists, as a group, played all of those roles in whole or in part, in the lives of the Fore people.

The book is a gripping tale, highly readable, that holds your interest throughout and allows both the Fore people and the kuru scientists to touch our hearts and our minds. I recommend this very worthwhile read. You will not be disappointed.

*Paul E. Cooper
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THE INFINITE POSSIBILITIES OF A BALANCED BRAIN - LIMITLESS YOU. 2008. By Lee Gerdes. Published by Namaste Publishing. 312 pages. Price C\$28 approx.

Lee Gerdes is a man with an interesting background including pastoral counseling, systems analysis and management consultant.

He uses a combination of these skills in his current position as CEO of Brain State Technologies, a company which has developed software algorithms to measure quantitative EEG and provide brain biofeedback. Gerdes' description (the most specific the book ever gets) is that his technology is "information fed back to the brain based on data collected by electrodes tactically on various areas of a person's head."

His hypothesis is that many diverse conditions of ill health: aggression, ADHD, addiction, chronic pain, depression, high blood pressure, cardiac arrhythmia, erectile dysfunction, cerebral palsy and coma are related to an imbalance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system. His program is able to measure these imbalances and then using sophisticated algorithms feed back auditory signals to assist the brain to become "more balanced". The balanced ideal has been painstakingly formulated over time from thousands of recordings especially those of trained meditators. Gerdes states that the person doing the program need not attend too closely or strain, as the program will assist the brain to move spontaneously towards balance – both physical and spiritual. It sounds too good to be true.

Balance and harmony are certainly of interest both to the lay public at whom the book appears to be directed and to clinicians or researchers. However the book falls short of satisfying the needs of either group. For the lay reader, the book lacks focus. The chapters jump from one problem area to another failing to build a cohesive argument. Significant claims are made without any data to back them up eg. "9 out of 10 methamphetamine addicts become clean within three days of brain training (pg. 179). For a scientific reader, the lack of clear description of the method and the lack of accurate, complete peer reviewed references supporting the method is problematic.

A quick google search turns up the website <http://www.brainstatetech.com/>. The site is similarly vague on detail and reliant on testimonials rather than data. The website lists scores of practitioners around the world, many in Canada. I note that people without any professional credentials can become trainers. Brain State Technologies may be a great idea but I would recommend waiting for evidence of effect before recommending either the book or the treatment.

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THIEME ATLAS OF ANATOMY (DVD) IMAGE COLLECTION: HEAD AND NEUROANATOMY. 2007. By Michael Schuenke, Erik Schulte, Udo Schumacher. Published by Thieme. DVD and 1182 illustrations. Price C\$200 approx.

I was pleased to receive the Thieme Atlas DVD on Head and Neuroanatomy, as I had long sought a reliable computer-based source of neuroanatomy images. However, my impression of the first edition of this DVD accompaniment to the Thieme Atlas series (which I did not have available to me) was mostly disappointing.

I am happy to report that both Macintosh and Windows versions of the image manager are present; unfortunately, there is no easy way to transfer the data from the disc to the computer hard drive, so start up and searching are maddeningly slow using either operating system (even with a high-speed disc drive).