

**Malformations of the Nervous System, Handbook of Clinical Neurology, Third Series - Volume 87.** 2009. By Harvey B. Sarnat, Paulo Curatolo. Published by Elsevier. 644 pages. Price C\$352 approx.

This superb book covers a rapidly expanding area of neurology in a remarkably readable fashion. The book is divided into four sections which flow nicely.

The first section covers specific malformations using the new integrative classification. Chapters cover midline hypoplasias, disorders of segmentation of the neural tube, hamartomatous disorders of cellular lineage, disorders of radial neuroblast migration and cerebral cortical architecture and finally other dysgeneses. Each chapter incorporates the embryology, clinical features and current knowledge of the relevant genetics and syndromes. Many sections also include discussions of diagnosis and management.

The second section deals with comparative clinical manifestations of CNS malformations. Each 10-20 page chapter provides a state of the art review of our knowledge in the areas of epilepsy, neuromuscular disorders, endocrine complications and dysgeneses associated with chromosomal and metabolic disorders. There is slight, but complementary, overlap with some of the earlier chapters. Throughout the book and particularly in these chapters, the authors provide excellent figures, which incorporate drawings of the anatomy and embryology in addition to neuroimaging and pathological pictures. At the end of the book there are a number of color plates which would have been more useful if they had been incorporated into the relevant chapters.

Section III addresses diagnostic methods with chapters on imaging and neurophysiological tests, including MEG. Another chapter deals with molecular genetic testing and genetic counseling. The final chapter in this section on embryology and the neuropathological examination is one of several chapters written by Dr. Sarnat.

The last section has chapters on the medical, surgical and neurorehabilitation management of children with CNS malformations. The final chapter in the book covers educational, cognitive, behavioral and language issues in this group of patients.

The book covers an area that most of us find complex and challenging. It is extremely readable and is quite comprehensive. Unfortunately the price of C\$352 will prevent many from buying it for their personal libraries but each medical school library and Division of Pediatric Neurology should have a copy of this excellent book.

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**NEUROPATH.** 2008. By Scott Bakker. Published by Orion Books. 306 pages. Price C\$35 approx.

No, this isn't a neuropathology primer. Scott Bakker is a writer based in London, Ontario whose previous works have been fantasy novels. This time he's written a thriller about a murderous neurosurgeon. It's New York some time in the next decade. Thomas Bible is a psychologist who studies the nature of consciousness. One morning an FBI team shows up at his office looking for help in catching Neil Cassidy, a neurosurgeon who's been Tom's best friend since university. Neil is the prime suspect in a series of assaults and murders. Through neurosurgical procedures he's altered individual's brains apparently in an attempt to demonstrate that consciousness and free will are illusions. Why someone would feel compelled to do this is never satisfactorily explained but it seems to centre around something Bakker calls the semantic apocalypse. Neil wants to demonstrate the old argument that we are all biomechanical machines free of true intention. The author presents this as if it's a startlingly new idea.

Bakker, who trained in philosophy, has clearly done his research into neuroscience and presents some thought-provoking ideas amongst the gore. However, his protagonist never seems to stop thinking like an article out of *Psychology Today*. For example, while sharing a drink with an attractive woman, he wonders what she thinks of him and ponders the fact that "preference for infantile versus masculine features tended to vary with their menstrual cycle." It's hard to identify with a character with quite so psychological a psyche. There are also several plot elements that are hard to swallow. While the FBI searches for his serial murderer friend, Tom decides it might be fun to let his four and eight year old children sleep in a tent in the backyard. Gee, what could possibly go wrong here?

The rising action of a mad scientist thriller is here, complete with a Goldfingersque scene (missing only Sean Connery and a laser beam) but the book is unnecessarily gruesome and characters have graphically described sex like automata (which, I suppose is compatible with the author's premise).

Neurologists and neurosurgeons may find it intriguing to see a thriller that takes on weighty neuroscientific and philosophical ideas. I looked forward to reading this novel. Unfortunately, once I got into it, I could only look forward to finishing it.

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