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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

(Page 9 a - Review by Puneet Setia, Forensic Pathologist)

...FEATURED BOOK : MAIN PAGE HEARTILY RECOMMENDED ...If you want to know what forensic radiology is all about, or perhaps want to start this discipline in your department, this is a good book for you. Go ahead and buy this book and get yourself accustomed to the subject. I, for one, would keep this book on my table permanently, as I keep getting medico legal cases daily in which radiology is required, and I know this book is going to be very helpful to me in my day to day work... [Main page] Reviews | [1] [2] Rating : 10.0...

Forensic Radiology, 1st Edition, by B.G. Brogdon. Hard Bound, 10.1" x 7.1" x 1".
CRC Press LLC, 6000 Broken Sound Parkway NW, Suite 300, Boca Raton, FL 33487-2742. , . Publication Date April 9, 1998. 496 pages, ISBN-10: 0849381053; ISBN-13: 978-0849381058 (alk. paper). Price: $162.95.

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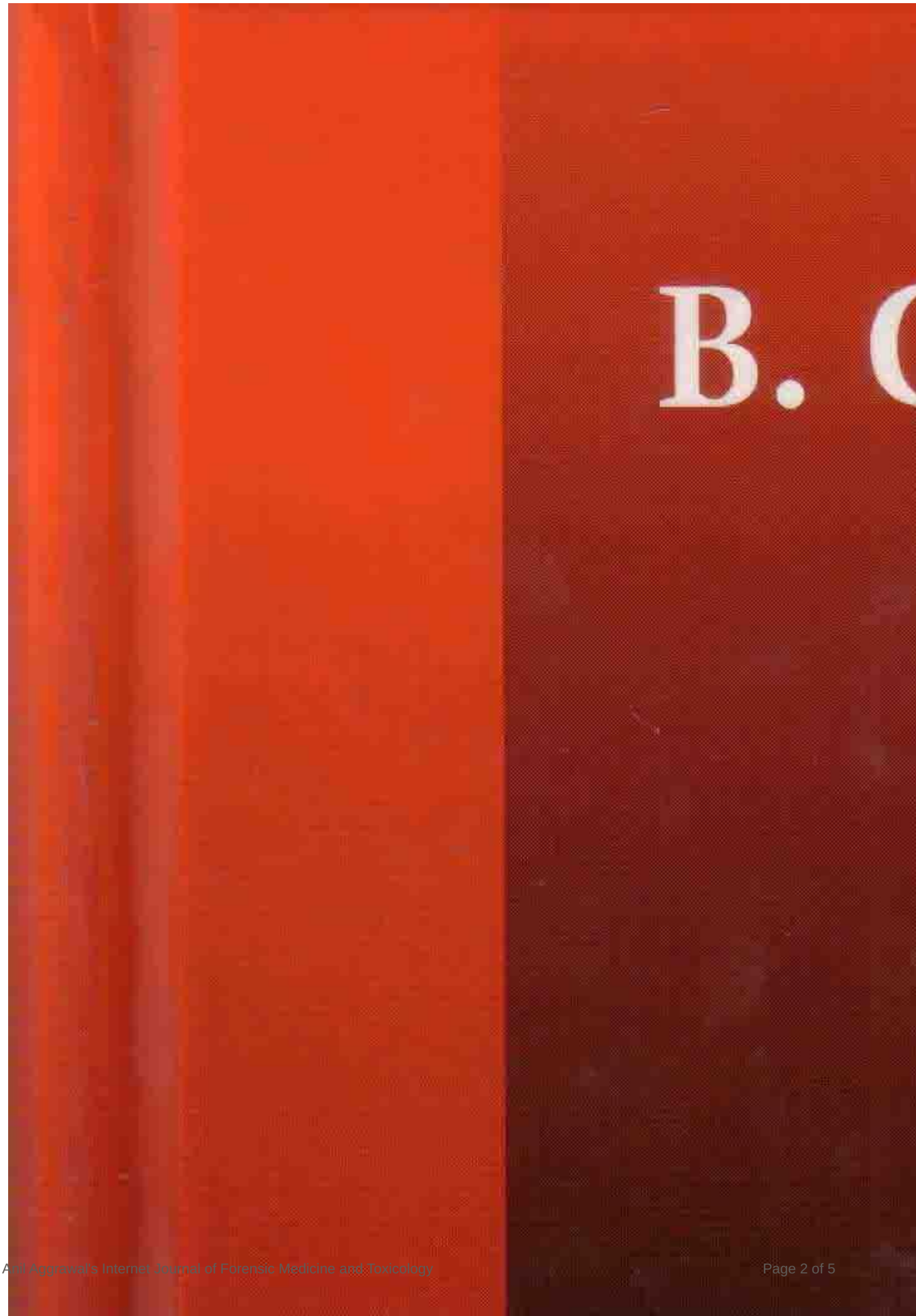
B. C

When I first heard that I was going to review a book on forensic radiology I was elated. The reason for this reaction was the paucity of books on this subject. Since I am a forensic pathologist having written a thesis in forensic radiology (post mortem coronary angiography) I have done a reasonable amount of research on this subject. So when I heard about this offer I accepted it gladly.

The author starts off the first section (Introduction to Forensic Radiology) by giving definition of various terms used in forensic medicine and radiology. The difference between forensic medicine and forensic pathology is nicely described. This is very important at the start of the book, more so because these two terms are considered synonymous by many. The description of various techniques of radiology is also very informative.

The next chapter deals with the history of radiology and forensic radiology. This, I think, is the most well researched chapter in this book. Things like the first x-ray, the photograph of Roentgen giving the first demonstration of x-ray etc. have been brought out from the annals of history. The description of the first experiment in forensic radiology, the first case in which radiology was used for conviction, etc. has been very informative. The various rulings and opinions of the judges, which have gone on to benefit forensic radiology, have been nicely described.

The next chapter dealing with scope of forensic radiology has been illustrated nicely with x-rays, photographs etc. The footnotes given with each x-ray / photograph describe them adequately and are also very informative.

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Section II on identification describes various methods used in identification of dead bodies, individual remains etc. It also describes the method of identification of bite marks to apprehend the perpetrators of crime. This section appears to be a repetition of what has been taught to forensic pathologists for ages. Still the description of methods of identification especially the tables and line diagrams have been described very adequately and in great detail. Table 5-1 describing the appearance of ossification centers is a good attempt but should have also included those centers that appear before birth. This is especially important in determining the maturity of the fetus. It is also required to check whether the baby was term or pre term. The big collection of x-rays and their description by diagrams gives a clear picture that helps in their better understanding. The description of the chapters on forensic dentistry has some excellent photographs. For someone using this book for the first time the explanation of anatomy, terminology used etc. are very helpful. The method described for repair of damaged films has immense forensic application. All in all I feel this section has been reasonably well compiled.

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Section III on gunshot wounds has been divided into two chapters. The first of those deals with the types of bullets, types of guns, their mechanics, their radiological features etc. This chapter, apart from some x-rays of good quality, does not have much to show of in terms of its contents. The second chapter describing the problems that can be encountered in dealing with forensic ballistics is better compiled and of greater significance. Here the author has described how some seemingly straightforward cases can be very confusing to the radiologist. That every forensic radiologist should be aware of these possibilities goes without saying. But where the author has erred is in not

describing that forensic radiology can be used to determine the tract of the bullet also. This can be done by either putting a probe in the tract or by putting a dye in it. This is very important in cases where the bullet is found at a place that cannot be explained without knowing about its tract.

Section IV entitled “Radiology in Nonviolent Crimes” deals with the use of forensic radiology in nonviolent crimes such as in smuggling, larceny etc. This is again a new topic not frequently encountered in textbooks of this kind. Here again the historical perspective has been dealt with in great detail. The author has described the ways in which forensic radiology can be used to detect smuggling. Maybe what he wants to suggest is that the best place to hide real diamonds is the person’s stomach. In a way he wants to suggest that if x-rays can detect diamonds in the stomach, the person can be released, as he is very unlikely to be carrying real diamonds. The description of methods of detecting forgery in pieces of art like paintings, antiques etc. are highly commendable. The amount of money involved in art these days makes it imperative that every attempt should be made to prevent forgery in them and forensic radiology can make a big contribution to that.

…Section V entitled "Radiology of Abuse" is a very valuable chapter. The use of radiology in abuse is a well-known fact. What stands this section apart is the use of excellent radiographs and their explanation. How the term ‘battered baby syndrome’ was coined, how it was first diagnosed, the various criteria for its diagnosis etc. have been nicely described…

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Section VI is entitled “Research And The New Modalities”. This section turned out to be the biggest disappointment of this book. I had thought this section would describe some of the latest modalities presently being used in forensic radiology. But the author seems to have been obsessed with child abuse. He has also forgotten that the main aim of forensic pathologist is to find the cause of death. He has not mentioned anything about post mortem angiography. Post mortem angiography, these days, is done for vessels of almost all organ systems of the body. We, at our institute, are currently doing post mortem angiography of coronary vessels and Circle of Willis. “A textbook of autopsy practices” by Jurgen Ludwig has mentioned techniques of post mortem angiography of esophageal, renal, hepatic, mesenteric etc. vessels. These techniques are being increasingly used these days to diagnose the cause of death. Also being used these days is whole body CT scan in cases of polytrauma. These are the things the author should have mentioned in this section instead of child abuse. This tells very badly on the author and gives an indication of how poorly versed he is with modern times and raises doubts about his competence to write a book of this magnitude.

…Section VII is entitled “Coping with the Courts”. Here the author has described the methods of how a forensic radiologist has to deal with the courts. He has told about the types of witnesses and the ways he has to answer in the court. A forensic radiologist / pathologist who cannot testify in the court properly will only make a fool of himself. No amount of theoretical knowledge is going to save him…

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Section VIII is entitled “A Primer For Forensic Radiological Technology”. This is again a section of immense practical importance. Unless someone is aware of the methods of radiological examination he cannot order about the correct position or the correct exposure for the x-ray. And an x-ray without both of them being correct is bound to be of inferior quality proving to be a burden both on the time and resources of the country.

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If you want to know what forensic radiology is all about, or perhaps want to start this discipline in your department, this is a good book for you. Go ahead and buy this book and get yourself accustomed to the subject. I, for one, would keep this book on my table permanently, as I keep getting medico legal cases daily in which radiology is required, and I know this book is going to be very helpful to me in my day to day work.

-Puneet Setia



Dr. Puneet Setia is working as an Assistant Professor in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at one of the leading medical colleges in India. His research interests include Forensic Radiology, especially the use of radiology in demonstrating coronary narrowing at the post-mortem examination. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at puneetsetia@rediffmail.com

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