

PHANTOMS IN THE BRAIN

The book “Phantoms in the Brain” is the most popular work of the author Dr. V. S. Ramachandran. Dr. Ramachandran has more than 180 publications to his name, quite a few of which have been published in journals such as Nature and Nature Neuroscience. He has been called the ‘Marco Polo’ of neuroscience by Richard Dawkins and the modern ‘Paul Broca’ by Eric Kandell.

Phantoms in the brain is basically a collection of bizarre neurological cases with a commentary provided on them by Dr. Ramachandran using his years of experience in this field. It’s written in a manner that makes the book a comprehensible read even for an individual without a neuroscience background. In my opinion it’s brilliantly written as it would add to the knowledge of a veteran neurologist as well as to those reading for pleasure.

The book comprises of a little over 12 cases, each of which is unique. This is followed by an explanation of the case and leaving a few questions to ponder about. The Author brings a remarkable concoction of cases which include cortical neglect, Capgras syndrome, the god centre in the brain, spirituality and agnosias. Ramachandran describes these cases with a lot of compassion making these cases more than just anomalies in a science book but real people with a medical condition. On several occasions there is apt use of pictures and anatomical images to get the point across with clarity. What adds to the experience of reading this book is several small experiments that the reader could carry out by following the instructions given within the book along with the read only, making it an active learning experience. Quotes and references to popular culture give the book a lighter touch and his wit is something to be commended about as it makes the book very funny. All these features of the book make it a pleasurable read. The author dabbles into a multitude of cases with an overview only, which lacks the in depth analysis. This may seem incomplete for the learned readers who would like to know more information about the case.

In conclusion, I would say that this is an excellent book for any individual who finds study of the brain interesting. The author does a brilliant job at keeping a balance between an easy and educational read. A must read for all associated with neuroscience.