

The Idiot Brain “Lifting the Lid on our Grey Matter” by Dan Burnett

The Idiot Brain “Lifting the lid on our grey matter” provides an entertaining description of the functioning of the brain and nervous system while keeping it “neurologically accurate”.

It delves into brain and body connections, sleep, memory, fear, intelligence, the five senses, attention, personality, anger, motivation, sociability, and mental ill health, to name a few.

The author is Dan Burnett, a neuroscientist, whose writing style is light, but at times a little too humorous. He does get the message across though and supports it with scientific rigour and current knowledge in the field of neurology.

The idiot brain talks about some of the every day common experiences we have and ties those back to the structure of our brain and the way it functions.

We think of our brains as the organ we think with but as the author points out, almost all of the brain’s activity is automatic. We have little or no –control over the way it stores information or responds to stimuli, no more than we control the beating of our heart or the way our liver metabolises waste.

This quote from the book itself exemplifies well the writing style:

“What have we learned so far about the human brain? It messes with memories; it jumps at shadows; it's terrified of harmless things; it screws with our diet, our sleeping, our movement; it convinces us that we're brilliant when we're not; it makes up half the things we perceive; it gets us to do irrational things when emotional; it causes us to make friends incredibly quickly and turn on them in an instant;—a worrying list. What's even more worrying, it does all of this when it's working correctly. So what happens when the brain starts to go, for want of a better word, wrong? That's when we end up with a neurological or mental disorder.”

This book is in summary a great, easily accessible introduction to neuroscience and psychology of human behaviour. For anyone not familiar with the topic it seems like a very good place to start.