



## Neuropath

*R. Scott Bakker*

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Tom's life is not what it once was. His marriage to the beautiful Nora is on the rocks and he now sees his two young children only on her say-so. His best friend Neil has moved to California to teach neurology. He has one success - a book on human psychology. Tom wiles away the time trying to teach bored grad students. But that all changes when Neil comes back into his life. For it seems that Tom's best friend was working for the National Security Agency, cracking the minds of suspected terrorists. Now it is Neil himself who has cracked and gone AWOL - what's more, he has left behind evidence that he has been employing his unique skills on civilians - obsessed with the idea that he can control the human brain.

Thus begins a terrifying sequence of events as Neil starts to kidnap and mutilate people with a connection to Tom. He damages their brains and then releases them - often leaving them mad. But only when he gets near his ultimate target does he reveal the full horror of his plan . . .

## Neuropath Details

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Author : R. Scott Bakker

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## From Reader Review Neuropath for online ebook

### Daniel says

My pre-ordering and reading "Neuropath" was a result of my following the hype behind it on a few book blogs and deciding to jump on early. Ever since I worked at a used bookstore (back in high school: it was my dream job at the time), I've tried to keep up with new books and new authors. Book blogs such as Fantasy Book Critic are, of course, great for this kind of thing, and once I started reading them I was hooked. It was only a matter of time before some of the mania that precedes some releases infected me.

I mention this because all of the lead-up to this book's release raised my expectations way up there--which, in turn, contributed to my less than favorable reaction to the actual story herein. You see, I went into this expecting it to mess with my head, to disturb my sense of human boundaries and capabilities--to just really fuck with me, like some bloggers said it did to them. I also looked forward to excellent prose and deep ideas, as these are both hallmarks of R. Scott Bakker's work in his fantasy repertoire ("The Prince of Nothing", etc).

This book did not rock my world; Bakker's prose did not impress me. The gadgets and tech that Bakker posits are neat, but his take on them comes across as alarmist. "They are going to read your mind, man!" The nature of this subject is sinister enough without laying it on thick. The mastermind super-villain that drives the story is your usual mix of know-how and loony, and the fact that I can't remember anything specific about his character suggests that there isn't enough there worth remembering. If someone promises a really dark and disturbing villain who has depth, then I am expecting someone like Gerald Tarrant, or Raistlin Majere, or the creepy it-girl from "Battle Royale" (the amazing book, not the silly film adaptation); in other words, there are some rich characters in my reading history, and a new one has to step it up to stand out.

I'm taking Goodread's rating scale literally and giving this the "it was ok," because that's how I felt about "Neuropath" while reading it and upon putting it down. With lower-to-no expectations, I might have enjoyed the book more. Such are the consequences of tapping in to hype.

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### Lightreads says

Soundbyte: Read Peter Watts's *Blindsight* instead.

Psychology professor is drawn into the FBI pursuit of his best friend, the sociopath who tortures through neurosurgery. It's a thriller about the implications of the brain as a physical substrate, how love for one's offspring, friendship, empathy are all physical processes that can be hacked and repurposed. It always surprises me how few people really *know* these facts, and are disturbed by them, because to me they are both obvious and kind of reassuring in a complicated way, but that's a topic for another time.

Mostly it's a book about the blindness of the conscious self known as "I," how we don't ever really have a grasp on sensory data, on other people, on our own decisions. Case in point: the consciousness known as "me" managed to strategically forget again that, oh yeah, *I hate thrillers* long enough for me to decide to read this one. This book embodies most things I hate about thrillers – unrelentingly awful people, twists made deliberately unfair, that vague desire to shoot myself in the head when it's all over. And it also didn't redeem itself through the treatment of modern consciousness research. Like I said, Peter Watts does a much more thorough, interesting job with this because he takes it to the next logical step – asking what consciousness is actually for, if it's so functionally useless.

### Neil Pearson says

This is a good example of how authors can be great in one genre and terrible in another. I'm a massive fan of Bakker's "second apocalypse" fantasy series and thought I may as well check out his other work. In hindsight I probably shouldn't have. This is his take on a blockbuster thriller and in that sense it almost works - especially the cringe-worthy elements that he later reveals are intentional. There are also some horrific scenes, the type you could imagine David Fincher would love to adapt. The problem is in "the argument". I have no issue with the concept of the brain and the illusion of free will etc but I don't need to listen to it incessantly. It's the reading equivalent of being stuck with a friend who's had a little too much to drink and will not let a subject drop. I think if there were variations on the theme every time it was revisited it would be more bearable but in essence it's the same argument and set of observations over and over again. It's curious how I've heard others level the same complaint at his fantasy work but I never noticed it there or I found it worked within the story better (I think the extra point-of-view characters at least varies things). It may boil down to me not being a fan of this genre but I'll certainly think twice before trying another non-fantasy book by this author.

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### Ethan says

This is one of those books that's not nearly so clever as it thinks it is. The debate about freedom and determinism is one that everyone seems to have an opinion about, but this doesn't mean that all of those opinions are well thought-out. I was hoping for a thriller with some interesting neuroscience and philosophy mixed in, but the positions on the debate presented in Bakker's book aren't very interesting or philosophically sophisticated (I'm not sure about the neuroscience, since that's not my field). However, while the philosophy is disappointing, the "thriller" aspect is kind of fun, which is the only thing that makes me give this two as opposed to one star.

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### KeAnne says

This was...words on pages and little more

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### Kyle says

If you've never heard of the consciousness is fake debate, it might be interesting for some of the science behind it, but if you have, then there's no good reason to read this book. Read *Blindsight* by Peter Watts instead. This book is more poorly plotted and characterized, has way more misogyny, and does the opposite of justice to the genre style (for a sci-fi/fantasy author going out-genre check out Melville's hardboiled "The City and the City"). It also contains faaaar too much science as an ideology, despite the characters' assurances of "rationalism" and "empiricism."

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## Steve says

Sometimes, no matter how much I like an author, their latest book ends up being a disappointment. NEUROPATH, by R. Scott Bakker, fit that description for me. I love Bakker's Prince of Nothing series, and I firmly believe his writing--in terms of quality--is some of the best in the fantasy genre. With NEUROPATH, Bakker attempts to put his spin on the thriller genre.

I really wanted to like this book. Seriously, I tried hard. It just didn't happen.

NEUROPATH follows the PoV of Tom Bible, a psychologist. If you have read Bakker before, the profession of the PoV should come as no surprise. Tom is divorced with two kids, and his relationship with his ex-wife is seriously strained. The main plot of the story focuses on Tom helping the FBI find his friend Neil, who has been working with the NSA on the study and implementation of manipulating people's brains. Neil has apparently gone off the deep-end, and is abducting and torturing people by messing with their cerebral functions.

Yeah, it's a cool concept. The novel's tag-line, "You are not what you think you are," serves as the central theme of the novel, and is also its greatest flaw. Half of the novel involves near maid-and-butler scenes where one character spends pages explaining a concept to another character. The first time it happened, I could forgive it, because it was well written. After happening a few dozen times, however, it tended to rub me wrong. Essentially, it's as if we the readers are reading a transcribed conversation between a psychology professor and his unconvinced student. The concepts are explained well, and the writing is fantastic, but the simple fact that Bakker is "telling vs. showing" is extremely problematic.

The novel, and its main characters, take a very strong nihilistic view on life. We are machines. We have no free will. There is no God. Our brains are organic computers that automatically react to variables and cause our reactions. Since all of the preceding are "fact," nothing in this life matters. Nothing. The main PoV, Tom, and his buddy Neil are major advocates of this belief system. There are a few token moments where Tom acts as if he doesn't want to believe this philosophy, but they are really just that: token moments with no real power behind them. As readers, the constant reiteration of those points takes on a preachy-feel. By the end of the novel, I felt like I was a dead horses being beaten. Hard. What's more, is that most of the side characters fall into automatically believing this philosophy without being given any real evidence of anything. Essentially, the PoV's take is, "Hey this is fact. Since I say so, you need to believe me. What? Of course I won't give you evidence. You're not smart enough for that."

Another issue that Bakker has is making females into over-sexualized objects. You know the instant a female main character shows up that she will be involved in some sort of sexual relationship with the main PoV. The scenes are graphic, but unlike the Prince of Nothing series, they don't seem to have much point other than shock-value. His characters in NEUROPATH seem to end up in porn-movie scenarios. They are, in a word, absurd.

As for the actual thriller aspect of the novel? Because, you know, that's kind of the point of reading a novel--either for the characters or the story. It's horribly cliché. A majority of the novel's actual plotting is terribly predictable, and the novel is full of the dumb character behavior that is typical of the thriller genre. In many cases Tom's decisions are just plain idiotic, and are leaned on like a crutch to provide more conflict. Tom has two kids (the kids were the only stand-out goodness of the novel), and his decisions regarding them are idiotic. Sorry, but I just don't like a character's stupidity to be the main cause for movement in a novel. I get enough of that from Dan Brown. There is also a separate, thin side story going on about a serial killer called the Chiropractor. He has no real purpose in the novel other than as an excuse why FBI resources are spread so thin. What he does isn't really explained, and when he inevitably shows up, it is for pure convenience and border-line Deus Ex.

The tone of the novel is VERY bleak. Much more so than any of Bakker's other works. There is a line in the novel where a character states, "I don't like happy endings." That is a pretty clear indicator of how things are going to go. Don't get me wrong, I like grim and gritty. NEUROPATH, however, was just too bleak for me. The abductions and murders that happen are very well done, and they lend perfectly to the thin story, but the ending of the novel has no redeeming quality in any sense of the word. When you match all that with the hopeless nihilistic philosophy saturating the novel, it's hard to like it. In the end, this caused my personal dislike.

I didn't hate the novel, I just didn't like it. Bakker is a seriously gifted writer. He manages to explain everything amazingly clear. Considering the deep topics, his writing makes them easily understandable, and makes the pace move along fantastically. I just couldn't like the tone or the execution of a terrific premise. But really, it all comes down to a really poor story. It does nothing but give clichéd plotting and clichéd twists under a thin veil of a psychological and philosophical preaching. Terry Goodkind gave the world enough of that, we don't need it from Bakker.

If you really dig psychological and philosophical debates and concepts, you may enjoy this novel. Especially if you are really into Bakker. But this is easily his weakest effort at story-telling. Not to mention, the graphic content will turn off a majority of people.

Content: If you are at all offended by sex, violence, language, or character stupidity as a plot device, you should avoid this novel.

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## Paul says

This review is pointless; it is deceptive, illusory and filled with meaningless rationalizations. Yet I've become conscious to the fact that I am writing it. Or I believe at least that writing it is an act of my own volition. Now that I've lost my entire audience with my incoherent ramblings, I can assure you that I haven't descended into philosophical lunacy or decided to embrace my inner nihilist. (I'm all for spanking one's inner nihilist, by the way.) Instead, I find myself slowly coming to grips with Scott Bakker's unsettling new novel, "Neuropath". And "unsettling" may just be a drastic understatement!

"Neuropath" is closer to an extreme paradigm shift in which what you think you know is utterly transformed into something else, something unknowable. It's Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" reworked for the postmodern crowd; a book that drags us out of our illusions kicking and screaming into the light provided by cognitive psychology and neurology. It strips everything it means to "be human" including the definition of "human". It's an amazing and brilliant must-read thriller that will resonate through you long after you've finished reading it. But ignore all this; it's just my rationalization module working overtime.

Thomas Bible is a professor of psychology at Columbia University. Suffering from the failure of his marriage, he finds solace in being a father to his two children, Frankie and Ripley. One night, his best friend since his college days, Neil Cassidy, a brilliant neuroscientist, arrives on his doorstep. (Bearing booze, an ex-college roommate's duty, of course.) As the two of them get drunk that night, talking, Neil finally reveals to Tom that he has been lying about his job. For the past few years, Neil has been working for the NSA, interrogating terror suspects through the use of invasive neurosurgery. By flicking off certain neural switches in the brain, Neil has discovered that he can get the terrorists to tell him everything he needs to know. Thomas is horrified by this revelation, only reassured by Neil claiming that he has recently quit the NSA.

As Thomas arrives at work the next morning, he is greeted by FBI agents. The agents play for Tom a disturbing video sent anonymously to them. The film details a neurosurgery in which the patient, who is

conscious throughout the procedure, feels either pleasure or pain when the unseen neurosurgeon flicks a switch in her brain. Thomas is appalled at the video, struggling to comprehend what he has witness, when the FBI agents shock him even further—his buddy Neil is believed to be the neurosurgeon responsible. Soon, Thomas finds himself helping a beautiful FBI agent, Samantha Logan, track down Neil as he continues to commit further atrocities. Struggling to uncover Neil's motivations for the mutilations, Thomas finally decides Neil is engaging him in "The Argument", a discussion from their college days about free will being an illusion and the dire consequences that follow from that fact. At the same time, Tom finds himself falling in love with Agent Logan.

While chasing after Neil, Thomas discovers his life spinning out of control. Surprise twists and turns lurk around ever corner. Just when Thomas thinks he understands Neil's motivations, circumstances shift to show him how truly clueless he is, and when his son Frankie is abducted, his desperation nearly leads him over the edge. Will Tom be able to save Frankie in time?

Bakker's novel is so intriguing it is almost impossible to put down. The action flows from one shocking incident to the next, filled in between with profound and disturbing insights. This elevates "Neuropath" above other contemporary thrillers in that it is an intellectual powerhouse of a novel. Bakker offers interesting observations and questions on selfhood, consciousness, love, morality, and government regulation. It's impossible to read the novel and not reflect on it, as it shakes the very foundation of what we conceive of as humanity.

Bakker's descriptions are beautiful and poetic, lovingly crafted and fresh. For example in describing Manhattan, he writes: "t once archeological, like a vast inscription with Central Park the indent of some God-King's seal, and yet statistical, like a great 3-D bar graph, charting the sum of human hopes against the GDP of nations—a Powerpoint presentation frozen in monumental stone." Or a simpler example in describing a forest blocking Thomas' view of Neil's cabin: [t:]he trees defeated the distances, obscuring any glimpse of the cottage." This is evidence of a mature artist's hand at work, filling his words with both beauty and thought. It's an irresistible combination for the reader, and Bakker works it masterfully.

Last Word:

What Scott Bakker did for the fantasy genre with the "Prince of Nothing" trilogy, he also does here for the futuristic thriller: namely, set the bar for greatness. For fans of science fiction or thrillers, "Neuropath" is a must-read classic, chilling, original and truly disturbing. It grabs you by your mind, and shakes you hard, never relenting, never apologizing, leaving you shattered by the end. Whether you hate it or love it, you are guaranteed to feel it.

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## **Kirstine says**

*"Have you an arm like God?"*

This was not as big of a mindfuck as I thought it'd be.

In the not-so distant, but slightly vague future Tom is tasked with helping the FBI apprehend his best friend Neil, who's started brutally murdering people to prove that meaning and love aren't real and only illusions of the brain.

'Neuropath' is extra interesting because it's based on actual research about the brain - Neil's fantasies about consciousness aren't as fantastical and fake as you'd like to believe as a reader.

It's a violent, unpleasant, unrelenting book about the very worst lengths humans will go to when meaning leaves them. It's at times cruel and heartless, but constantly thought-provoking. If you've ever read anything by Bakker, either this or his fantasy series you know he's bleak. He revels in the meaningless, the dark, the grimy, the dirty, the evil. He asks hard questions and rakes his characters through bloody mud full of pointy, rusty nails.

In person, however, he's awfully pleasant, soft spoken and just plain *nice*. He visited my university in the spring of 2015 for a lecture titled "Writing after the death of meaning", a lot of it went over my head, I admit, I'm not nearly as intelligent as he is, and philosophy is hard on my brain, but it was immensely interesting. And he mentioned this book. He talked about it as a book that changed people, in a bad way. He mentioned he'd had a friend who'd sort of stopped talking to him after reading it. I understand that, I understand that to some people this might make them honestly sad and depressed. You shouldn't read it if you're prone to paranoia or shit like that. It's a hard book.

It asks this (very simplified): what if we're nothing but brains responding to other brains? What if there's no *self*, no *I* controlling our actions? If free will is bogus? What if the brain can be manipulated? What if reality is nothing, if it's an empty shell, if all is, essentially, meaningless?

Not fun, friends.

Apart from the very philosophical themes, it's a pretty good thriller. It's complex, it's surprising, and it had me constantly on the edge of my seat, hoping against hope that all would end well.

I liked it. I liked it a lot. Perhaps because I wasn't very affected by it, and thus felt no need to throw myself in a ditch and perish. I understood the point he was trying to make - or maybe I should say the question he wanted to ask, and I found it incredibly interesting. It's fueled many debates since, and I keep bringing the ideas I got from reading this up in conversation (and I feel okay doing it, because it's, as I said, based on actual research). In that regard it served its purpose; it expanded my horizon and it made me think, really, really think about some very fundamental things.

It's not a book for everyone, and parts of it were perhaps unnecessarily unpleasant, but on the other hand, it wouldn't have made such an impact otherwise.

I believe R. Scott Bakker also said this isn't a book he'd ever recommend to anyone. I wouldn't either. Read it if you find the premise interesting or if - like me - you're really into R. Scott Bakker, but be warned it's somewhat depressing. He wrote it before he had kids, and stated he never could have written it after. The level of cynicism he needed to tap into to present the worldviews of these characters simply wasn't accessible after having kids. When you've read it you get what he means.

The reason it wasn't as big a mindfuck as I expected is probably that I'm very stubborn. To the whole question of "what if we're just brains responding to outside stimuli, what if we don't have a self?" I answer: Who cares. We're in this world and we must make the most of it. Whatever I am, I will do my damndest to be the best I can be. Don't care if *I'm* deciding it or my brain is. The result is the same. Be kind, people, and don't hide your douchebag behaviour behind science.

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## Alex says

I have to admit, I was one of the people lured in by how depressing **Neuropath** is supposed to be and how ruthlessly it makes its case. My expectation was that I wouldn't want to like this book, but end up doing so

anyway. Take a look at my rating; I obviously didn't do the latter.

The first problem with this book is that both setting and characters are dull. The setting is pretty much the world during the time the book was written, except that climate change ruined the world, the US law enforcement and intelligence community has become fully authoritarian instead of somewhat-authoritarian and there are t-shirts with animated pictures on them. Also, neuroscience and its practical applications are far advanced. Sadly, the ramifications of this technology end at more authoritarianism and more opportunities for philosophical rants. As far as worldbuilding goes, **Neuropath** is one of the weakest sci-fi books I ever picked up. This is made worse by it trying to be prophetic, when all it did was capture contemporary fears (of terrorism, the Bush-administration and climate change) and exaggerate them.

The characters are slightly better than the setting, but not by much. The main villain of the story, Neil, is the lovechild of your stereotypical edgy atheist and the jerk that stole your girlfriend. He's charming, ruthless, cruel, and highly intelligent. The protagonist, Thomas Bible, is Neil's best friend, and an apathetic loser who spends most of the book contemplating how awesome Neil is. It gets bland sometime after page 30, but goes on and on and on for the rest of the book. Neither of these characters is very compelling, and taken together, they don't make for a good story. Neil is simply overpowered and basically drives the entire plot, with Thomas as his mouthpiece. And these are the two best-written characters in the story. At least they appear like real people, which is more than can be said of anyone else in this story. Save for Thomas' children, especially his daughter, but they can hardly carry this piece nor are they supposed to.

The philosophy is mostly carried through dialogues, I'll deal with the latter first. A typical exchange goes like this: Neil does something horrible, to prove a philosophical point; someone expresses his outrage over this point; Thomas tells them that Neil is right; they lose their shit and storm out of the run, intellectually vanquished by Neil. That third person can be any character in the book besides Neil and Thomas, but the reaction always stays the same (which is part of the reason why the characters suck so hard). It's not even like there was a fundamentally different philosophical view that was being discussed each time. No, it all ties back into Neil's radical materialism and nihilism, something I'll come back to later. In general, all the dialogue - even the one that differs from this format - only serves to make a philosophical argument, or just any argument. At one point, a man is knocked out with a roundhouse kick, and Thomas' contemplates that this could cause long-term brain damage or even turn out lethal. Yeah, no shit, a roundhouse kick directly to the face is dangerous?! I already knew that, and I don't want to be reminded by it for the sheer sake of ruining everything that's fun!

Now, to finally let the cat out of the bag: The philosophy of **Neuropath**. Was it as good as everyone says it is? Well... no. Not at all. Basically, you're nothing but your brain (or rather the processes going on inside it), you have no soul and not even a real essence. Everything you love and care about is an illusion, including religion and morality. That's interesting to hear about, but it cannot carry an entire book by itself, not when it's presented in such a redundant manner and with all the good counter-arguments left out. Neil makes his case that individuals have no soul or essence and no free will by rewiring their brains, hence you could easily create a counter-argument based on a difference between internal processes of the brain and external interference. That would at the very least spice the book up, so that I could appreciate it as a philosophical tract.

As it is, **Neuropath** simply isn't fun. It's overly long, the story and all its elements are bland, the action is forced and uninspired, and the philosophy just isn't that great. Part of the reason why it gets two stars (with a tendency towards three stars, even) is because of the end scene, where Neil presents "the argument", as it's called in the story, most effectively, and in the most gruesome and harrowing manner imaginable. This scene was genuinely very good and would've made for an exciting short story *and* a decent philosophical work, as I don't expect a short story to deal with every argument and counter-argument under the sun. In short, these last twenty to forty pages are everything that's good in **Neuropath** condensed and refined. Too bad it was

just a torture to get there.

If you want to get a taste of Bakker's radical determinism and materialism, read Peter Watts. His books are both more sophisticated (even though I eventually ended up disagreeing with a lot of his philosophical ideas) and far more fun to read than **Neuropath**. He even got an addendum where he explains the science behind his works, with footnotes no one ever reads and shit like that. That's my personal recommendation, but as **Neuropath** is a very polarizing work, take it with a grain of salt. Maybe you'll enjoy it, even though I didn't.

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## Kannadin says

When I started to read this book, I hesitated between giving it 1 or 5 stars.

1 because obviously I didn't like this book.  
5 because it's certainly... an experience.

I actually bought that book because people kept raving about this author and his Prince of Nothing's series... which I've yet to read.

I wish I had read the reviews before buying it. It's been years since I've read a book so disturbing... and not in a good sense. I'm familiar on the debate on consciousness and will. We've got lots of scientific and psychological talk in this book so I won't bother talking about it.

It's not really this that disturbed me nor the questions raised about how we're progressively giving governments our civil rights in the name of security. These questions have been raised for years in books such as 1984 and while I find them important and that we should as citizens think and talk about them, it doesn't prevent me from sleeping.

No what I found disturbing were the very graphic and creepy scenes featured in this book. Very graphic and disgusting. This book was sick. Frankly, I wonder how anybody can even imagine this. The whole thing was just plain disgusting and sick.

The worst was the 30 or so pages of torture at the end. Torture. 30 pages of how a nutcase was torturing his "best friend".

I finished this thing in two days because I knew that if I let more time pass, I would never ever pick it up again. And why did I bother to read it through the end? Well, I want to become a storyteller myself so I thought I'd broaden my horizon... but I don't think I came richer from that experience. Apart from nightmares and a feeling of utter revulsion, this book left me empty. There's nothing positive about it. Nothing.

This book is definitely not for everyone. In a way, I'd say it's well written. I can't say it didn't leave a lingering impression. It left an impression for sure and all I want is cleanse my brain of this psychopathic nightmare. So 5 stars for that.

Was it positive? Did it bring me enjoyment? No. Was I excited reading this psycho thing? Certainly not. Did I want to read it while I read it? Definitely not. I think the themes talked in it could have been explored in a different way. A way that wouldn't have made me want to throw and burn this book at least.

If you're sensible and don't take particular enjoyment in gratuitous violence, well avoid this. I'm a huge fan of Naoki Urasawa whose known for his thrillers... but at least we deal mostly with the good guys and the psychopaths are broken humans not beasts.

I'll definitely read reviews of R. Scott Bakker's other novels before risking myself reading those still on my TBR.

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## Robert says

As far as psycho thrillers go, I feel like I grew out of the genre years ago, but I picked this up because I had faith that Bakker would deliver something worthwhile. After all, this is the man who gave me the "The Prince of Nothing" trilogy.

While "Neuropath" isn't near as compelling and awe-inspiring as those three books, it's certainly well-written and thoughtfully provoking. A lot of it follows typical, well-worn patterns in the genre -- a little "Silence of the Lambs," a little "Seven." But then Bakker sets the tale around 30 years in the future, in an age wrecked by poor environmental policies, a pornography-eroded culture and a post-war-on-terror police state.

The core of the book? A mild sci-fi take on cutting-edge neuroscience and psychology. And, of course, Bakker spreads his own philosophical ponderings throughout. The heart of the novel deals with the nature -- and perhaps the illusion -- of human consciousness. The neurological content in the book really floored me at times, made me ponder self (as well as the faces on MARTA) in an entirely new and unsettling light.

Bakker says that with this book he set out to write a psycho thriller that was both viscerally and intellectually disturbing -- he certainly delivers on the later.

(I was really torn between giving this a three and a four. I have issues with some of the choices Bakker made in terms of the storyline, but thought the characters were solid and the subject matter utterly enthralling. So consider this something more like a 3.5 or 3.75.)

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## Luther Wilson says

The Semantic Apocalypse... If this book doesn't freak you out I don't know what will. Seriously: reader beware. Go look on the internet, you'll find reviewers who recommend against reading it... not because it's a bad book (I read it compulsively)...but because it cuts the legs out from under our most cherished notions of what it means to be a person. On the surface it's a thriller about a divorced psychologist and a serial killer. And on that level, it's compelling and disturbing. But its "Argument" is what is really scary...Bakker suggests (if that's the right word for this positively obsessed book) that science is showing (and will ultimately force us to accept) that our sense of ourselves as conscious "persons" -- moving through life making free choices -- is an illusion created by our brains. Indeed sometimes the book seems like an essay (or rather a polemic), with the characters just ranting Bakker's Argument. But the fact is that the story and the characters are compelling, and even though I sometimes thought "this person would not be going into the details of an argument for a worldview at a time like this", I still found it compelling -- because both the actual polemic speeches AND the plot AND the characters go toward the same point: "be dismayed...we are but brains...". Bakker presents a compelling case for the proposition that our conscious "selves" are largely devoted to rationalizations, that our sense of autonomy and personhood are brain processes going on in a small part of our brains -- meanwhile the larger part of our brain runs on as a meaningless machine, creating illusions like time, morality, love for our children....seriously: reader beware.

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## Elaine says

You will be enthralled with this book or disgusted by it. It is sensational, and I can see where it could be very gripping to some people. It is certainly not just a thriller, as advertised. It is a philosophical discussion of whether or not we are just a bundle of neurocircuitry with brains acting as the controlling station for signals, or whether we truly have minds and emotions. Much of it reminds me of philosophy, I field I abandoned in sophomore year of college in favor of more data driven knowledge. I have no quarrel with the argument that science has more and more demonstrated the neurological underpinnings of our abilities such as facial recognition and fear. Nor do I have any quarrel with the evolutionary origins of behavior. And, yes, I am sure that love originates in the care that one creature gives another. In other words, one's babies and one's dogs love one originally because you feed them, but that is not the whole story. Does that mean love is only a neurological reaction? If so, how explain that is love is withheld or one's caregiver can no longer give or one becomes independent of him or her, one still may love that person? Harlow proved long ago that when baby monkeys had all their needs met except for love, they did not thrive. Babies in large, sterile orphanages with all their physical needs met still don't thrive without someone to love. Love is more than a reaction. Okay it developed in evolution because love and bonding better assured the survival of social species, but if evolution is merely a mechanism for survival, then why have social species at all? Why not individual species all fending for themselves with the fittest being the only survivors. This book makes the case that free will is an illusion.

Well, Bakker forgot to look in one area of science, one very concerned with neurocircuitry: linguistics. Even when we uncover all the neural pathways to understanding and speaking, we can't explain that every human has the ability to create words they've never heard, to encode messages they've never heard before, and to think new thoughts and express them using words and syntax differently from everything ever expressed before. Moreover, these novel expressions may have nothing whatsoever to do with survival. They may be purely in the realm of fantasy, "twas brillig and the slity toves..." Every language has the means to create new messages, to change its syntax, and to create new words or make old words do new duty. There is no limit on what can be expressed. There is no point in any language at which one can say, nothing new can be said. This infinite creativity of language requires more than preexisting neural pathways. Humans have to have consciousness, intent, desire, and, yes, love.

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## Emelia says

Neuropath is a book that is labeled as "Suspense", however in my humble opinion it is a far cry from suspense. It blew me away. Yes it has the brilliant serial killer playing games with the world as well as the FBI chasing down the bad, but brilliant villain, murder and mayhem, graphic scenes etc; however it is "The Argument" that was the most intriguing part of the book and what this review focuses on.

A Columbia University psychology professor Thomas Bible is approached in his office by a pair of FBI agents. They show him a gruesome video of a missing porn star's apparent self-mutilation, and tell him that his old college buddy Neil Cassidy is responsible for it and enlist Bible to help them track down Cassidy. "The Argument" is something that Thomas and Neil have been discussing since their undergraduate days. And this is what is most interesting.

Yes, there are thriller moments and the book is not short on suspense. (I would call it a scientific, physiological, techno-thriller.) But as I said Cassidy and Bible's old discussions are what fried my brain and made me think and rethink the whole concept of perception and consciousness. In Bakker's Neuropath "The Argument" is that perception and consciousness are nothing more than crude chemical and electrical processes inside our brain and that everything we think and feel and do is meaningless, that no choice is ever made, and nothing ever known; that consciousness and all that goes with it, such as free will, is an illusion

that our brains trick us into believing. It is a scary concept that perhaps everything we think has been preprogrammed and that there is nothing such as a truly independent thought.

If you are a fan of philosophy and deep intellectual debate, then I suggest you read this book. Since reading it I have lost a few hours of sleep and spent a few hours on the phone with friends discussing "The Argument" and all of its disturbing implications and it's horrific potential. Even discussing it brings up further ideas and debatable spaces that can really take the mind to places that are strange and bizarre, and down right frightening. Needless to say I had to put the book down a few times and had several WTF moments. (I usually would not use that phrase but in this case there is no other phrase I can substitute.)

At some points the book lags, but overall I liked it, a lot. It is a book that I will continue to discuss for awhile and a book with concepts that I am sure will wake me up in the middle of the night saying "Ah ha! But what if....." It is well worth reading if for no other reason than to make you think, rethink.....and think again.

\*Christopher, you have ruined my restful nights. Thanks for the rec.....I think ;)

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