

## BOOK REVIEW

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### Review of: *Forensic Science: An Illustrated Dictionary*

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**REFERENCE:** Brenner JC. *Forensic science: an illustrated dictionary*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2004, 286 pp.

*Forensic Science: An Illustrated Dictionary* is an expanded version of Brenner's *Forensic Science Glossary* (CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 1999). This book is an effort by Brenner to keep pace with the ever-growing terminology of the disciplines that comprise the field of forensic science—a sizable task considering the recent explosion of interest in the field. *Forensic Science: An Illustrated Dictionary* includes terms from both the emerging and also the more traditional, but certainly expanding, branches of forensic science. It addresses a plethora of areas including, but not limited to, DNA technology, biochemistry, trace evidence, drugs, toxicology, firearms identification, questioned documents, photography, computer forensics, crime scene investigation, pathology, and law. The definitions are presented strictly in the light of forensic science, which is appropriate for a field-specific reference. For example, discipline is defined as “a major area of casework for which a laboratory may seek accreditation.”

As this example illustrates, the definitions are succinct. By keeping the definitions direct, readers are given precise information that should help them in understanding potentially confusing terminology. However, some of the definitions appear to be too limited in scope. Rape is defined as “sexual intercourse between a man and woman without the woman's consent. This may occur by deception or by force.” Although in and of itself, this definition is true, it is incomplete and ignores important social issues. The definition, as provided, does not acknowledge rape of a man by a woman, rape by a same sex assailant, or rape of a child by an adult. All of these situations are in the purview of the discipline and should be presented in the definition.

Even more disturbing was the incorrect definition of acetaldehyde—“a colorless liquid having a pungent and fruity odor; highly flammable and toxic, used chiefly to manufacture acetic acid. The first product of ethanol metabolism. Also known as ethanol.” Acetaldehyde is *not* also known as ethanol. In order for forensic science to continue to gain respect, mistakes such as this must not be allowed to enter the literature, especially the literature designed to be used as a reference in the field.

As the title of the book indicates, definitions are not the only focus of the text; illustrations are included in order to aid the reader. Unfortunately, the reviewers were disappointed in the quality, quantity, and diversity of the images. The images tend to distract from the text rather than add to it. In some ways, it appears as if short cuts were taken in order to compensate for a dearth of visual aids. For example, the same photograph is used three times to illustrate the term “chamber” (Fig. C.12), “chromatography” (Fig. C.15), and “thin-layer chromatography” (Fig. T.4). While reviewing the book, at least seven other such pairs of repeats were identified. Still, other photographs were simply snapshots of old-style posters, which gave a very out-of-date feel to the illustrations. Lastly, the book is printed in black and white, which lessens the impact of some of the photographs (e.g., those depicting colored reagents, positive color test results, organ discoloration, and blood splatter patterns).

There are also a number of editorial considerations with the book. There are misspellings, inconsistencies between figure legends and the figures themselves, serious omissions in some definitions, and mislabeled photographs. The book also would have benefited from the cross-referencing of related terms.

Given these errors and editorial oversights, it is hard for the reviewers to recommend this book until these issues have been addressed. There is great promise that this book, in a later edition, will provide the field with an accurate and useful reference.

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