

# The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons: The History of the Human Brain as Revealed by True Stories of Trauma, Madness, and Recovery

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The author of the bestseller *The Disappearing Spoon* reveals the secret inner workings of the brain through strange but true stories.

Early studies of the human brain used a simple method: wait for misfortune to strike -- strokes, seizures, infectious diseases, horrendous accidents -- and see how victims coped. In many cases their survival was miraculous, if puzzling. Observers were amazed by the transformations that took place when different parts of the brain were destroyed, altering victims' personalities. Parents suddenly couldn't recognize their own children. Pillars of the community became pathological liars. Some people couldn't speak but could still sing.

In *The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons*, Sam Kean travels through time with stories of neurological curiosities: phantom limbs, Siamese twin brains, viruses that eat patients' memories, blind people who see through their tongues. He weaves these narratives together with prose that makes the pages fly by, to create a story of discovery that reaches back to the 1500s and the high-profile jousting accident that inspired this book's title.\* With the lucid, masterful explanations and razor-sharp wit his fans have come to expect, Kean explores the brain's secret passageways and recounts the forgotten tales of the ordinary people whose struggles, resilience, and deep humanity made neuroscience possible.

\*"The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons" refers to the case of French king Henri II, who in 1559 was lanced through the skull during a joust, resulting in one of the most significant cases in neuroscience history. For hundreds of years scientists have gained important lessons from traumatic accidents and illnesses, and such misfortunes still represent their greatest resource for discovery.

Sam Kean is the author of the New York Times bestsellers *The Disappearing Spoon* and *The Violinist's Thumb*. His work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Mental Floss*, *Slate*, and *New Scientist*, and has been featured on NPR's "Radiolab" and "All Things Considered."

Longlisted for the 2015 PEN/E.O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award

One of Amazon's Best Books of the Year: Science

One of The A.V. Club's Best Books of 2014

A Goodreads Choice Awards Finalist: Nonfiction

"This is Sam Kean's finest work yet, an entertaining and offbeat history of the brain populated with mad scientists, deranged criminals, geniuses, and wretched souls. *The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons* is one of those books that will have you following your

friends around, reading passages out loud, until they snatch the book away from you and read it for themselves. Good luck getting it back."-Amy Stewart, author of The Drunken Botanist

"Put your Netflix queue on hold. Sam Kean's The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons will command your full attention from the first page. It's not just an engaging guide to mysteries of existence; it's compelling story-telling for anyone with a taste for the bizarre and metaphysical."-William Poundstone, author of Rock Breaks Scissors

"In tale after tale, best-selling author Kean provides a fascinating, and at times gloriously gory, look at how early efforts in neurosurgery were essentially a medical guessing game.... Entertaining and quotable, Kean's writing is sharp, and each individual story brings the history of neuroscience to life. Compulsively readable, wicked scientific fun."-Kirkus

"Reading this collection is like touring a museum of neuroscience's most dramatic anomalies, each chapter taking us to a different place and time.... Kean's colloquial language and intimate voice bring all of this series of mini-histories to life -- all of which are sure to stimulate a wide range of brains."-Publishers Weekly

"[Kean] proves an able guide, connecting each story with the science behind it, always with an air of enthusiastic curiosity."-Kate Tuttle, Boston Globe

"[Kean's] strength lies in his storytelling, and in the humane combination of humor and compassion toward the strange life histories he pieces together.... Kean has a penchant for the kind of vivid description that makes one want to clutch one's head tenderly close."-Margaret Quamme, Columbus Dispatch

"To pick up one of these stories is to lose oneself in them. Where does the brain end and the mind begin? Curious readers will find both brain and mind fully revved up while engaging with this powerfully appealing and thought-provoking work of neuroscience history."-Donna Chavez, Booklist

"The author's skill in illuminating how the brain functions and malfunctions manifest themselves in people's lives makes for absorbing reading.... These avowals ultimately raise weighty, compelling questions about the nature of identity and what it means to be human."-The Wall Street Journal

"Strokes, seizures, accidents: if they don't kill, they can traumatize the brain so badly that an individual's personality can be significantly changed. But, explains New York Times best-selling author of the terrific The Violinist's Thumb, early neuroscientists saw such traumas as an opportunity to study the brain's wondrous workings."-Library Journal, "Barbara's Picks"

"Beyond paying tribute to the scientific advances these patients made possible, Kean humanizes the patients themselves."-Scientific American  
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