Book Review

By

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Crime scene analysis and scene reconstruction is really nothing new. Most crime scene analysts, detectives, and other forensic practitioners are familiar with the general concepts of scene and event reconstruction and their success in crime fighting often depends on their ability to discern what all happened during the commission of a crime. However, most of the scene analysis is based on individual experience and training rather than any standard approach to the process. This text introduces one of the first standardized and logical methodologies to reconstruct and explain the series of events that takes place during the commission of any violent crime.

This text follows the pattern and style of earlier texts written by the authors’ including several hundred colored photographs, a logical order and progression, and is easy to read and follow the authors’ major teaching points. The initial chapters provide a brief but interesting background of many well known historical and contemporary forensic experts with their own comments and efforts at scene reconstructions and the use of scientific analysis and principals. The authors’ further develop their overall theories and general principals surrounding the reconstruction process, and provides one of the better overall explanations of the use of the scientific method and its proper role in scene analysis.

The text has numerous relevant case studies which highlighted the authors’ main points. One particular case study of a was used very effectively as a means to walk the reader through the authors’ *Event Analysis Process*, literally as a step by step method, using a combination of crime scene photos and other case facts to determine what events happened and in what sequence. This is one of the better explained case studies that I have ever read and it was used very effectively to outline the analysis process. Especially helpful was demonstrating how all of the evidence at the scene should be used in combination with each other to determine proper sequencing of events and how they fit together in the overall event.

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The authors’ also included chapters pertaining to understanding the basic crime scene protocols and their effects on reconstruction, the proper use of bloodstain pattern analysis, the basics of shooting incident reconstruction, and the importance of working with the forensic pathologist. Each of these chapters centered on how each of the forensic disciplines can provide important pieces to the overall reconstruction puzzle. It was also very refreshing to note these chapters were all written on an intermediate knowledge level and did not spend a lot of time rehashing or restating the basic concepts of these disciplines, found in so many other texts. This approach allowed the authors’ to come to the point, rather than spend a lot of time going over the same basic material. However, what is introduced is the importance of interlocking all available forensic disciplines and physical evidence together into the analysis.

The book concludes with individual chapters on suggestions on writing the crime scene reconstruction analysis report and using demonstrative exhibits in support of the written analysis. There is also a chapter dealing with aspects of inductive and deductive analysis and the use of logic as part of the analytical process.

I found the book very well written and invaluable as a reference in crime scene analysis. But, certain sections may take reading several times to get the full understanding of their point, specifically the authors’ use of flow charts to document and explain how they came to the results of their analysis. Although I had seen this technique before, it still took me reading this section several times before I could fully understand it. The authors’ provided a good example of a proper flow chart, but it took a few tries on my own to finally get the hang of developing my own in the manner as they suggest.

The same is true for the chapter introducing their Event Analysis Worksheet. The worksheet was designed as an aide to assist the analyst in refining and refocusing their attempt at using the ‘scientific method’. Their work sheet is also designed to help the analyst deal with what is described as ‘information overload’ that frequently takes place during a complicated reconstruction. Although its proper use was explained fairly clearly, it took a length of time to grasp the concept and use it.

On a personal note I’m not sure I would ever use the author’s particular structured method in reconstructing the event, probably because over the years I have developed my own personal style which seems to work for me. However, I have already incorporated many of their suggestions in my own analysis style. The real value of this structured and standard method would be for someone who has not yet developed their own bad habits or someone who is just getting into crime scene reconstruction analysis. The actual value of the text for me was the emphasis and examples of using the various disciplines together to form an opinion and then validate my findings through the scientific method as they describe. There were also some very good pointers described in the shooting incident reconstruction and Bloodstain pattern interpretation and I will be incorporating in my own analysis.

I would unhesitatingly recommend this book to anyone interested or involved in crime scene investigation and event reconstruction. It is written at an intermediate level which makes it a bit easier to read and use for experienced practitioners, but it’s not so advanced that it would be over the heads of college students or newly assigned crime scene personnel. It’s a good reference source that I will be able to use in the future.