ANATOMY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, by J.A. Merrills, Sweet & Maxwell, London (available in Canada from Carswell Legal Publications, Toronto), 2nd edition, 1981, pp. xv and 146, $27.00.

In the past few years, law book publishers all over the world have introduced the phenomenon of the "concise law" introductory text in the various areas of the law. The basic aim of most of these introductory texts is to provide a very rudimentary outline to the relevant topic. The second edition of the "Anatomy of International Law" text is one of the introductory works in Sweet & Maxwell's "Modern Legal Studies" series. The pertinent question is whether the book is a satisfactory introductory text.

Even those not knowledgeable in the area will realize that the title of the text encompasses a tremendous amount of legal material. The subject matter of the text has filled numerous treatises and occupied the lives of numerous jurists over the decades, indeed over the centuries. Therefore, inevitably, a text on the anatomy of international law becomes a study of the "skeleton" of the anatomy of international law. Moreover, the author has attempted to discuss major events in international affairs that occurred since the publication of the first edition in 1976, such as the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviets and the Iranian hostage-taking incident.

In the first part of the text, the author deals very briefly with the following topics:

(a) the sources of international law;
(b) why States disagree on the content of international law;
(c) the interpretation of international law by international judicial bodies, domestic courts, international organizations and legal scholars;
(d) the enforcement (or lack of enforcement) of international law.

The factual description of the above issues is very basic and succinct. To gain a more advanced knowledge of these issues, recourse must be made to the primary sources and other texts in the area. However, as regards analysis of the issues by the author, the reader will be pleasantly surprised. Throughout Part I of the text, the author infuses in his discussion his central thesis that the peculiar character, strength and failings of the international legal order stem from the fact that it is a highly decentralised system, where the subjects of the system make the legal rules (and so feel that they can break them too).

In Part II of the text, the author analyses the functions of international law. He addresses basic issues of criminal and other types of jurisdiction, the rights of individuals under international law, and the limited use of international law and international organisations to promote common interests and to control the use of force. Again, in this part, the author manages to bring interesting if not original analysis to his factual description. The author insists that one can only view the successes and failures of international law in the context of the fractious geopolitical, social and economic environment of the international community.

In Part III, the author attempts to analyse the significance of international law in international relations and disputes. This is the most interesting part of the text. The author first illustrates how States often attempt to justify dubious actions by using international law (what the

author calls auto-interpretation). There then follows a discussion as to how international law required States to fulfil treaty obligations, and a discussion of judicial methods of settling continental shelf boundary disputes, a topic which seems rather out of place. The author concludes that to prevent the system being undermined, provisions of international law must be precisely defined to prevent them from being used to justify illegal actions.

Turning to the role of international law in times of crisis, the author identifies four basic roles of international law, namely: inhibiting illegal action, structuring the dispute in legal terms, limiting the extent of the conflict or hostile measures, and finally, perhaps, even resolving the crisis. However, the author correctly warns of the limitations of international law even in these areas in times of international crisis.

Finally the author discusses the influence of extra-legal principles on the role of international law in crisis management. The issues discussed are the role of self-restraint by governments and domestic courts in attempts to head off international conflicts, geo-political consensual limitations, and other similar non-legal ground rules observed by all the power blocs in the international community. While the discussion tends to get a little shallow in places, such as the assertion that the Soviet Union and the United States respect each other's "spheres of influence", it is generally thought provoking.

The final diagnosis of the present state of the anatomy of international law is summed up by the author as follows:

> "In international law, there are no easy answers. Whether there are legal answers at all may often be debatable."

In conclusion, examination of the anatomy of international law can never be done justice in a text of this scope and size, but the diagnosis of the present state of the anatomy of international law and the analysis of the prevention and cure of international disputes is realistic and thoughtful.

E.P. Mendes
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Law
The University of Alberta