

《試管中的惡魔》

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內容概要

從911之後的美國炭疽信攻擊事件切入，回溯1960、1970年代WHO根除天花的經過，再探討到四級實驗室的安全、生物武器、人性的問題，與最近SARS、禽流感等疾病所引發的議題相若。全書以小說筆法撰寫，情節緊湊，引人入勝。

精彩书评

1、Richard Preston's first work of non-fiction, "The Hot Zone" was a gruesome look at emerging viruses in general, and the Ebola virus in particular. However, no matter how grotesque it got, the reader could detach themselves from the book because Ebola is basically unheard of in the developed world, and isn't particularly effective at spreading (it kills its victims too quickly). His latest, "The Demon in the Freezer" is another story altogether. In it, he discusses the appalling specter of smallpox in general, and weaponized smallpox in particular. By using the anthrax attacks of 2001 as a jumping off point, he delves into a fascinating exploration of a disease that most people consider eradicated. Unfortunately, Preston reveals that this is far from the case. While it is true that smallpox hasn't occurred naturally in 25 years, it is accepted (if not altogether proven) that the Russians have significant stockpiles of particularly virulent smallpox. Moreover, it seems probable that some of this material has found its way into the hands of other actors (Iran, Iraq, North Korea). Finally, given the abundance of smallpox samples available just three decades ago, it seems likely that parallel programs could have been pursued in any number of countries. In clear (if you've studied any biology at all, you should be fine with the terms in this book, and there is a glossary), vibrant language, Preston explores the personalities and institutions involved in trying to understand what smallpox today would mean. With a significant portion of the population having never been vaccinated, and the efficacy of 30-year-old vaccinations in serious doubt, it is a certainty that the release of even "natural" smallpox would be an absolutely devastating event. But what is even scarier is the possibility for engineered viruses that could burn through a fresh round of vaccinations and that would be almost impossible to counter. As compelling as the subject matter is, and as breathless as Preston's writing is, it bears mentioning that he does an excellent job of staying above the scientific debate. His narrative is nothing if not evenhanded, and he goes to great lengths to report varying points of view in an engaging, but dispassionate tone. The closest he comes to editorializing is when he takes a jab (that is to my mind well deserved) at the Clinton administration for handling the Russians with kid gloves when the U.S. knew for a fact, from a variety of sources that, they had huge stockpiles of smallpox. The end result of this rather typical bungling was the loss of security, the loss of accountability, and the loss of awareness as to the material's locale. In light of the Bush Administration's recent decision to begin immunizing health care workers, and to begin stockpiling enough vaccine for every American, this book takes on a whole new importance. Anyone who doesn't understand the decision, or what the consequences of bio-warfare are, would do well to read this book. Moreover, anyone who doubts the grave threat to all mankind posed by smallpox will find this book a disturbing eye-opener. It is eminently readable and is loaded with fascinating, downright terrifying, information.

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