

[PDF] The Demon In The Freezer : A True Story

Richard Preston - pdf download free book

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Author: Richard Preston

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Description:

On December 9, 1979, smallpox, the most deadly human virus, ceased to exist in nature. After eradication, it was confined to freezers located in just two places on earth: the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta and the Maximum Containment Laboratory in Siberia. But these final samples were not destroyed at that time, and now secret stockpiles of smallpox surely exist. For example, since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the subsequent end of its biological weapons program, a sizeable amount of the former Soviet Union's smallpox stockpile remains unaccounted for, leading to fears that the virus has fallen into the hands of nations or terrorist groups willing to use it as a weapon. Scarier yet, some may even be trying to develop a strain that is resistant to vaccines. This disturbing reality is the focus of this fascinating, terrifying, and important book.

A longtime contributor to and author of the bestseller , Preston is a skillful journalist whose work flows like a science fiction thriller. Based on extensive interviews with smallpox experts, health workers, and members of the U.S. intelligence community, *The Demon in the Freezer* details the history and behavior of the virus and how it was eventually isolated and eradicated by the heroic individuals of the World Health Organization. Preston also explains why a battle still rages between those who want to destroy all known stocks of the virus and those who want to keep some samples alive until a cure is found. This is a bitterly contentious point between scientists. Some worry that further testing will trigger a biological arms race, while others argue that more research is necessary since there are currently too few available doses of the vaccine to deal with a major outbreak. The anthrax scare of October, 2001, which Preston also writes about in this book, has served to reinforce the present dangers of biological warfare.

As Preston eloquently states in this powerful book, this scourge, once contained, was let loose again due to human weakness: "The virus's last strategy for survival was to bewitch its host and become a source of power. We could eradicate smallpox from nature, but we could not uproot the virus from the human heart." --*Shawn Carkonen* --This text refers to an alternate edition.

From Publishers Weekly Never mind Ebola, the hemorrhagic disease that was the main subject of Preston's 1994 #1 bestseller, *The Hot Zone*. What we really should be worrying about, explains Preston in this terrifying, cautionary new title, is smallpox, or variola. But wasn't that eradicated? many might ask, particularly older Americans who remember painful vaccinations and the resultant scars. Officially, yes, nods Preston, who devotes the first half of the book to the valorous attempt by an army of volunteers to wipe out the virus (an attempt initially sparked by '60s icon Ram Dass and his Indian guru) via strategic vaccination; in 1977 the last case of naturally occurring smallpox was documented in Somalia, and today the variola virus exists officially in only two storage depots, in Russia and at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta (in the freezer of the title). To believe that variola is not held elsewhere, however, is nonsense, argues Preston, who delves into the possibility that several nations, including Iraq and Russia, have recently worked or are currently working with smallpox as a biological weapon. The author devotes much space to the anthrax attacks of last fall, mostly to demonstrate how easily a devastating assault with smallpox could occur here. He includes an interview with Steven Hatfill, who has received much press coverage for the FBI's investigation of him regarding those attacks; his description of meeting Hatfill, hallmarked by a quick character sketch ("He was a vital, engaging man, with a sharp mind and a sense of humor.... He was heavy-set but looked fit, and he had dark blue eyes") is emblematic of what makes this *New Yorker* regular's writing so gripping. Preston humanizes his science reportage by focusing on individuals-scientists, patients, physicians, government figures. That, and a flair for teasing out without overstatement the drama in his inherently compelling topics, plus a prose style that's simple and forceful, make this book as exciting as the best thrillers, yet scarier by far, for Preston's pages deal with clear, present and very real dangers.

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