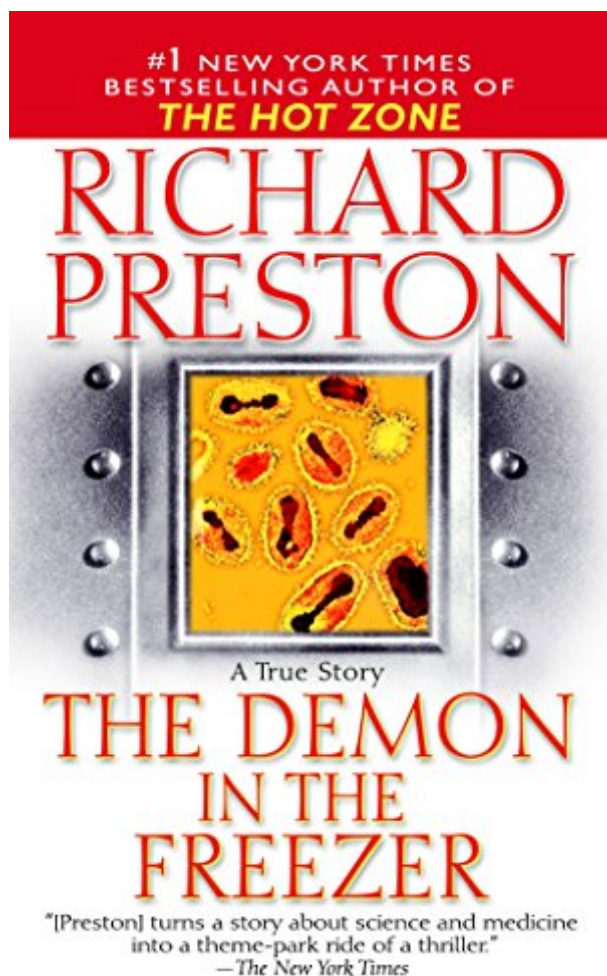


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The Demon In The Freezer: A True Story



Synopsis

“The bard of biological weapons captures the drama of the front lines.” —Richard Danzig, former secretary of the navy
The first major bioterror event in the United States—the anthrax attacks in October 2001—was a clarion call for scientists who work with hot agents to find ways of protecting civilian populations against biological weapons. In *The Demon in the Freezer*, his first nonfiction book since *The Hot Zone*, a #1 New York Times bestseller, Richard Preston takes us into the heart of Usamriid, the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Maryland, once the headquarters of the U.S. biological weapons program and now the epicenter of national biodefense. Peter Jahrling, the top scientist at Usamriid, a wry virologist who cut his teeth on Ebola, one of the world’s most lethal emerging viruses, has ORCON security clearance that gives him access to top secret information on bioweapons. His most urgent priority is to develop a drug that will take on smallpox—and win. Eradicated from the planet in 1979 in one of the great triumphs of modern science, the smallpox virus now resides, officially, in only two high-security freezers—at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta and in Siberia, at a Russian virology institute called Vector. But the demon in the freezer has been set loose. It is almost certain that illegal stocks are in the possession of hostile states, including Iraq and North Korea. Jahrling is haunted by the thought that biologists in secret labs are using genetic engineering to create a new superpox virus, a smallpox resistant to all vaccines. Usamriid went into a state of Delta Alert on September 11 and activated its emergency response teams when the first anthrax letters were opened in New York and Washington, D.C. Preston reports, in unprecedented detail, on the government’s response to the attacks and takes us into the ongoing FBI investigation. His story is based on interviews with top-level FBI agents and with Dr. Steven Hatfill. Jahrling is leading a team of scientists doing controversial experiments with live smallpox virus at CDC. Preston takes us into the lab where Jahrling is reawakening smallpox and explains, with cool and devastating precision, what may be at stake if his last bold experiment fails.

Book Information

File Size: 775 KB

Print Length: 306 pages

Publisher: Random House; 1 edition (October 8, 2002)

Publication Date: October 8, 2002

Sold by: Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B000QCSANQ

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #27,695 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #1 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Science > Biological Sciences > Biology > Microbiology #2 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Medical eBooks > Internal Medicine > Infectious Disease > Communicable Diseases #2 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Biological & Chemical

Customer Reviews

Preston makes the subject understandable, readable and enormously terrifying. He brings to popular literature the grotesque reality of the achievements of the Soviet bio-weapon work, long ignored by most of the academic community. While the Soviets are not considered a threat, the lessons of their massive research effort are too widely known to not be a potential foundation for current efforts. Unlike nation-state attempts to produce material for nuclear weapons, bio-weapons do not require the scale or leave the signatures of nuclear material production. The author does a great job in describing the process of taking an already deadly threat and engineering it into an even more dangerous threat using commonly available technology and knowledge. Forget the massive arrays of centrifuges needed for production of weapons grade nuclear materials. This is stuff that can be done in something not much more sophisticated than the typical meth lab once the bio-engineering is completed. It's interesting to talk with those who deal with the cleanup of meth labs, more and more meth labs are being operated out of campers and trailers with no fixed location. Deployment of bio-weapons is made far easier when survival of the attackers is not a consideration in the plan. In addition to the threat of the disease, its impact on the population would be catastrophic. The problem of containment in a mobile, self centered population almost guarantees that geographic quarantine of an exposed population will not work. Our personal resources and attitudes would be a great friend of the epidemic. Without protection for health workers and those who are needed to deliver food and other essentials a total breakdown of civil order is almost assured. In the face of even a small scale bio attack the overextended trauma

system would offer little help. The recent rail crash outside Los Angeles left about 130 injured, about half with minor injuries. The balance, perhaps 65 people were distributed to trauma centers up to 50 miles away due to the vastly reduced capability of the regional trauma centers to deal with more than the normal day to day crash and gunshot victims. Each year marks the further reduction in capacity of the trauma care systems in most areas as hospitals fail or reduce capacity. There are no easy answers but what is clear is that wishing the threat will go away and ignoring the need to research better options for handling it when it comes will be judged harshly when those who survive write the history of this era. Highly readable and unforgettable. In an election year it should be one of the topics up for discussion rather than the daily drivel.

I became an avid fan of Richard Preston's work after reading *The Hot Zone* (about the outbreak of Ebola in the monkey house in Reston, Virginia). *The Demon in the Freezer* does for smallpox what *The Hot Zone* did for Ebola. Richard Preston has a talent for taking complicated issues and procedures and presenting them in a manner easily understandable to those without a technological background. The book details the history of smallpox and profiles many of those who helped eradicate it back in the 1970s or who currently conduct research in this field. What makes the book compelling (and frightening) are those sections in which Preston describes the lack of control of the surviving strains (supposedly located in only two laboratories through the world) and how easily those strains could be engineered to produce apocalyptic-level bioweapons. Unlike a horror novel that the reader knows is fiction, *The Demon in the Freezer* will keep you up at night because this scenario is a possibility.

Scary to the max! Well written and excellently documented. I have read other books by this author -- notably "*The Hot Zone*" -- and can recommend him highly. He makes technical biology very accessible. In this case, he brings smallpox to life with immediacy. It makes the world-wide threat all too real.

This book is interesting. It tells the story of the eradication of smallpox from the whole world. It goes on to describe the scientists's fascination with the virus. The author believes that this is a an error because it is possible now to engineer the virus so it can overcome vaccinations.

I bought this book and another about the Zika virus with everything that's going on. This book is flat out scary at times, the cover particularly caught my gaze and I wasn't prepared for the story but I

can't fault the author because the book has changed how I look at the control efforts now and the dangers we face. Anthrax before this book seemed like a distant thought but knowing how easy it could be for an outbreak to happen anytime is scary. Most scary is how these diseases are said to be possible weapons in wars in the future. So yes the book won't be re-read but I'm glad I did.

Although the book talks about the anthrax attacks after 9/11, the government's response, and the science behind it to try to contain the problem, and find the culprits, it really is about smallpox. The effort to rid the world of this plague and our final victory when it was completely eradicated. However it also shows humanity's indecision to destroy its stocks and the work of some nation-states trying to weaponize it. This book reads like a thriller, and it was hard to put down. Fantastic, absolutely fantastic.

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