



Level 4: Virus Hunters of the CDC

Joseph B. McCormick , Susan Fisher-Hoch , Leslie Alan Horvitz

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Ebola, Lassa Fever, AIDS--few natural disasters inspire such utter panic as a rampaging virus. In this gripping, true account of the war against worldwide epidemics, one of medicine's frontline generals, Dr. Joseph McCormick, developer of the CDC's legendary hot zone, chronicles his decades as a virus hunter, working to combat the virus as predator. 16-pages of photos.

Level 4: Virus Hunters of the CDC Details

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From Reader Review Level 4: Virus Hunters of the CDC for online ebook

Heather Smith says

It only took about 15 pages for me to remember why I picked this book up in high school only to lose interest and give it back to the library unfinished. Sure, it's about one of my favorite subjects - epidemiology - and it's set in interesting, exotic locations. But somehow, it still manages to be boring.

It took me over 6 months to read it because I was trudging through it four or five pages at a time, sometimes without opening it for weeks because I had zero motivation to do so. As much as I loved the accounts of field work in Africa, Pakistan, etc., I feel like the book spent entirely too much time describing how hard it is to get any science done in third world countries. I understand that it's frustrating, as it frustrated me, too. But really, if you want a fascinating book about filoviruses, read *The Hot Zone*. Seriously. A big chunk of this book is just review from that anyway.

Sara J. says

As a second year medical student with quite a bit of microbiology information under my belt, I found this book absolutely fascinating. Sure at times there were slow bits where they would describe a lab's construction or a biochemical test, but I thought it gave a very frank representation of infectious disease doctors working on the global scene and in public health. It was enlightening to be given a look behind the scenes of some of the mass outbreaks of viruses that terrify the general public, and even more incredible to hear the truth (and not mass hysteria reporting) about many of these viruses. I can't say it's inspired me to work in public health, at the CDC, or abroad chasing infectious diseases, but it's definitely opened my eyes to these fields on a global scale.

Stephanie Fox says

This is a great book that tells each situation like it is: virus hunting, the poverty that drives decision-making by medical practitioners in economically depressed areas, and how it feels to actually be there, dealing with personalities and motivations.

I loved the part about Dr. Fisher-Hoch's trip to Saudi Arabia. As a woman who has been to the Middle East and studied the culture - and who will not accept limitations on women - I was intrigued to read that she had not known what the culture and legal limitations for women are like there. What I loved was her decision never to return, no matter what they might need from her. (I went to a country next door, where this was not a problem.) It was anecdotes like that that made the narrative seem real and comprehensible. They applied virus hunting to everyday life.

The book segues neatly between the two physicians as they share the narrative, taking turns. It was fascinating.

Erin McBroom says

Engrossing history of the epidemiologists who worked to find the source and cure for Lassa fever, now known as Ebola after the river in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) where it was first identified.

Mariaj91 says

Hands down one of my favorite books ever. I have read it many times. This book is especially interesting as ebola has come back into the news in recent years. For people squeamish there is some mentioned things like blood and animal research but it's not gratuitous nor particularly abundant.

Jared A says

"Public health" is far too often ignored / dismissed by my conservative kin. We functionally exterminated smallpox; why shouldn't we do similarly with the Malarias, Ebolas, and so on in the world? Of all the scary happenings in the world, pathogens are far worse than car bombs. Drs McCormick & Fischer-Hoch were both inspiring and heartbreaking. I felt like I was walking with and standing next to them through all the ups and downs of their incredible careers.

Katie George says

The fascinating stories of two CDC epidemiologists who spent years working in Africa, as well as Asia and South America, chasing highly contagious and dangerous viruses. There were some slow points in the book, but overall, I found it extremely interesting to read about the actions of actual epidemiologists working first hand with these viruses in their host countries. The book deals mostly with Lassa Fever, which I admittedly knew very little about before reading this book. I had picked up this book because of the words "tracking ebola and the world's deadliest viruses" that were written on the front, so I was initially disappointed that Ebola was only briefly mentioned. Overall, however, I found the stories fascinating and thought the Doctors did a wonderful job at explaining the science and the techniques involved without dumbing them down too much.

Samantha says

An excellent, fascinating look at the experiences of two epidemiologists as they travel around the world trying to puzzle out various diseases. This is good stuff - plenty of suspense as they deal with unexpected threats and try to figure out where a disease originated, coupled with interesting stories about the challenges of maneuvering around and trying to practice science in third-world countries. Fairly easy to read, too - definitely written for the layperson. If I had one quibble, it's the transitions between sections written by each

author. They uses phrases like "But that's Sue's story. I'll let her tell it" and so forth. That just struck me as a bit awkward, though I'm not sure how I could have more effectively arranged it. Anyway, that's a minor thing. Over all a truly fascinating read.

Chana says

I enjoyed learning about the various Level 4 viruses like Lassa fever, Ebola, and other hemorrhagic fever viruses. It was fascinating learning what the vectors for passing the diseases to human could be, such as ticks, mice urine, rats etc, how the diseases are spread in hospitals by the lack of proper barrier nursing procedures and the re-use of needles, and all the symptoms of these diseases and how they are treated in developing countries under crude conditions and how they are treated in first world countries like the United States and England. So those were the parts of the book that I liked and that made the book worth reading. What I didn't like was the switch between narrators and constant Sue and Joe and Joe and Sue and Sue and Joe...after they started working together in 1983. I didn't want to be involved in their personal lives and to start thinking about when their romance started and the reasons for their divorces etc. But the Sue and Joe and Joe and Sue...kept my mind there and without knowing what went on in Joe's marriage, besides his constant absence from home, I started feeling sorry for his first wife. So I think the book would have been much better just written by Joe, or if it was written by both of them, just leave it at colleagues with no discussion of personal lives.

Heather says

So my criticisms for this book remain. It seems to be a direct response to "The Hot Zone" by Richard Preston by continually saying things like "despite what popular fiction and non-fiction novels say Ebola does not 'melt the organs' they stay intact" which is fine. Maybe Preston exaggerated a bit, but the truth is that his writing is both compelling, exciting, and informative. This book suffers from too many narrative voices, as well as trying to be both clinical and compelling

Mish says

A highly interesting book about, among other things, how deforestation puts humans into contact with deadly viruses, reduces the possibility of living off the land, as well as how certain viruses were found and diagnosed, and how viruses spread/don't spread among and between humans and animals based on sanitary conditions.

This book also made me want to shower, but I'll settle for staying in the USA. Not that it helps; one of the last viruses that is discovered made its way to the USA through the import of Monkeys (creatures that are used for testing by cosmetics industries as well as being used for testing by the pharmaceutical industry). It also shows how Africa in general, being significantly poverty-stricken in the locations these viruses were showing up, could not afford the patented tests, kits, or vaccinations that they need just to survive.

The book leads me to conclude three things:

1. Vaccinate yourself, and if you have any, vaccinate your damn children. Herd immunity IS all it is cracked

up to be

2. With the advance in global climate change heating up the ice and releasing any and all pathogens trapped within: it won't be the rising oceans that kill us but the deadly diseases none of us are equipped to handle resurging, and that combined with airplane transport means that there is nowhere that is safe.
 3. The biggest obstacle in getting people worldwide the vaccinations that they need relies (at least in big part) on funding. Give your money wisely, but give. Or, stop patenting life-saving machinery and then selling it at a rate you know poverty-stricken countries cannot afford even on an individual basis.
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Jenny Maloney says

No lie: there are some slow parts to this episodic narrative of the hunt for some not-so-slow viruses (AIDS, Ebola, Lassa, and Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever among them). But that's only to be expected. The real world is not like *Outbreak* and there is years of research behind vaccinations, understanding the origins of a disease, and developing treatments. Lucky for the reader that McCormick and Fisher-Hoch kept the narrative as fast-moving as they did, because it could easily, easily, easily get bogged down in technical detail.

That being said, the sections that delve into the social and physical consequences of these diseases are fascinating and quick to get through. As a reader, I definitely appreciated the circumstances and difficulties that face all medical staff, around the world. The responsibility is a heady one.

As far as the storytelling itself goes, I struggled with the two first-person accounts after Chapter 13. Intellectually, I understand that there are two people creating a larger picture for me...but I question the way in which it was told. The biggest jar was the switch from McCormick's narrative - which took the reader throughout central Africa, putting the reader flat-out on the road hunting for viruses and BAM! we were introduced to Fisher-Hoch's life experience (which was certainly necessary, I'm not saying it wasn't) in London.

After that, it's an alternating narrative with awkward transitions from one person's experience to the other like the following (initially in Fisher-Hoch's perspective): "This was a new Ebola all right, but it was an Ebola that had let us off the hook. This time. Still, there was trouble ahead. Joe experienced it all firsthand. Let him tell it:" (pg. 299) It becomes downright annoying in the final chapters of the book.

The other difficulty with readability is *exhaustive* repetition. I realize that these are very complex diseases and the methodology used to collect and examine the viruses are not easy. I appreciate the doctors' obvious and extensive education - but the reader of this book is not going to be an uneducated person, so it's unnecessary to repeat, ad nauseum, what ribavirin is (a definition is given about four times - if the reader didn't get it after the first definition, the reader ain't gonna understand the stories at all anyway). Same with chloroquine treating malaria.

Generally these repetitions occur when telling the victims' stories and are used to illustrate the unsuspecting nature of the victims and their doctors...but the reader knows what's going on and understands that these mistakes happen, it's easy enough to say "like X situation, they did Y instead of Z" without *defining* everything over again.

However, if you want to understand the world medicine theater of the 80s and early 90s, I don't think you'll

find a better overview than in this book. The relation of poverty to disease is well-documented here. It's here you find the epiphanies that led to the use of gloves, needle sterilization, and the use of disinfectants to protect from outbreaks. Here is why we screen blood. Here is the introduction of Hep C and AIDS - and an explanation for why these diseases are rampant in some areas and not others.

~Jenny

Place for the Stolen

Underground Writing Project

Adriane says

So my criticisms for this book remain. It seems to be a direct response to "The Hot Zone" by Richard Preston by continually saying things like "despite what popular fiction and non-fiction novels say Ebola does not 'melt the organs' they stay intact" which is fine. Maybe Preston exaggerated a bit, but the truth is that his writing is both compelling, exciting, and informative. This book suffers from too many narrative voices, as well as trying to be both clinical and compelling. It made me pretty confused.

On the good side they were exceptionally compassionate towards the victims of the disease and the issue of poorly run third world governments. They also made another good point in that these diseases have probably always been around in rural and farming communities but have come to light due to overpopulation in cities and the subsequent outbreaks in urban hospitals due to the overpopulation and decrease in hygiene.

My main disappointment with this book is although I find the lab techniques interesting, the thing I want to know is exactly how the diseases work. Why I liked "The Hot Zone" and "Yellow Fever, Black Goddess" so much is that they talked about how the diseases worked on a cellular level, not just the symptoms and treatment. So they somehow managed to be extremely clinical while not giving me the details I find the most interesting.

Writing-wise, Susan is far more interesting of a writer than Joe, but near the end of the book they start combining paragraphs so you don't know who's writing what till they refer to each other. That makes it very confusing. There are also several blatant grammatical mistakes which considering that I was reading an "updated" copy really should have no excuse being there, this wasn't the first print.

But despite all my problems with the book, they still told a really solid story about finding and fighting disease in hellaciously poor and war-torn parts of the world.

Peaching Kaze says

I was pretty enthralled by this book, until it became a love story...

Becky says

Every time I have a sore throat I'm going to think I'm dying of some viral hemorrhagic fever. I really liked learning about all these infectious diseases but did not realize this book is almost 20 years old until about

halfway through. I wonder how many advances the world has made in tackling the disease covered in this book since it was published. I really hope there have been some advances and the general apathy shown by some of the governments has diminished.
