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Invisible Enemies: Stories Of Infectious Disease



Synopsis

Menacing microbes that made history This book tells the story of seven tiny microbes that altered forever the course of human history. Smallpox, leprosy, plague, tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, and AIDS have aroused terror wherever they have appeared, terror that has inspired acts of incredible courage and horrible cruelty. With compassion and an eye for detail, Jeanette Farrell writes of societies in turmoil and of committed searches for cures, of gruesome, misguided treatments and of the triumph of the human spirit. Illustrated with over fifty reproductions of photographs, newspaper cartoons, and public health posters, *Invisible Enemies* is an intriguing mix of biology and history with a worldwide scope.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 6 Up-Seven infectious diseases (smallpox, leprosy, plague, tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, and AIDS) are covered in this excellent book. For each one, the author highlights the causes of the affliction, the history of its treatment or lack thereof, popular notions and fears that have often led to additional suffering beyond the trauma caused by the illness, and the story of how breakthroughs came about (or what still needs to be done). Filled with fascinating facts, the text is written in a crisp and lucid style that makes the most complex matters understandable. Although this could easily be a dry subject, the author does such a wonderful job of presenting it that some chapters are as exciting as any work of fiction. The black-and-white photos and reproductions illuminate details about historical perceptions of the diseases. A riveting account. Todd Morning, Schaumburg

Seven major killers are discussed here in up-to-date, straightforward essays, about 30 pages for each, with four or five images of worthies, posters, cartoons and the like. The emphasis is historical and clinical: what happened, what still happens and what is done for it. Not much of the laboratory is here, little talk of viral strains or physiology; the scene is implicitly hospital, office or sickbed, a familiar level well suited to readers 12 years old and up. "Leprosy," long misnamed and misunderstood, is a fascinating chapter. Hansen's disease--it was he who found the germ in the 1870s--is in fact the least contagious of all the scourges discussed in the book. It was false fear that has doomed leprosy sufferers: a Greek term for a blotchy skin disease was used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew term for "unholy." The patients had varied facial disfigurements, sometimes specific numbness in hands, feet, even eyelids, all very rarely fatal. On so slight a curse they were exiled and rejected for 2,000 years. The World Health Organization thinks it may effectively end the public health problem--that is, reduce the prevalence of leprosy to one person in 10,000 worldwide in a few years. The U.S. caseload is below that now, at about 7,000 cases. Smallpox is extinct, barring biological warfare. Plague is carried in the U.S. mainly by prairie dogs; antibiotics and rat catchers may soon end it in cities. Cholera was all but ended by understanding that its fatalities were brought on by dehydration; copious drinks of water cure patients in a day or two (with a little salt and sugar to help it down). But malaria rages on; maybe a Chinese botanical drug of high promise will eventually succeed. And tuberculosis might be met with enough money, but the battle against HIV/AIDS is still at crisis.

The book came in excellent condition. It is a great read and highly recommended if you don't need it for class. It gives a great history of certain diseases that we know, and also their modern implications.

Had to read this for a class but it is a GREAT BOOK FOR ANYONE, especially if you are interested in history. Book really illuminates aspects of human life that we are now so oblivious of in a modern world. Great read. It's not even too bad for the squeamish.

Love it :) want this lady to write more books!

Loved it. I ended up writing a term paper on globalization and disease. I used this and 4 other books

as my topic creation. Well written and quick to read.

I thought this was a very interesting and well written book. I have always been fascinated with infectious diseases and I found this book to be very easy to get into.

Good

My experience as a person with M.E. affected how I thought about the issues in this book and I cannot separate those reactions from my general thoughts about the book for this review. To see the ways in which other illnesses have been treated and dealt with by government and society and to compare that with the ways Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) has been dealt with was just fascinating. For example, in 1900 in the US there was an outbreak of plague in a booming seaport town (California) and with plague came the sensible calls for quarantine to stop its spread. But it never happened. Business leaders, aware that huge sums of money were to be lost if they were unable to operate for such a long period of time, either refused to acknowledge the epidemic at all or else they claimed that it was merely a disease confined to the Chinese - as by mere chance the first plague victim happened to be Chinese. The medical authorities accordingly took action against the Chinese and there was no quarantine. Meanwhile all but one of the city's newspapers refused to print news of plague. The governor declared, to protect business interests, that there was no plague. Despite there being very good evidence that indeed, plague was rampant, he then fired all the medical authorities who dared to disagree with his warped views. He even proclaimed that it should be made a felony to report plague in the town. (This rings so many bells re ME!) The book also talks about how medicine began to shift from valuing careful observation of patients and their symptoms to doctors not seeing or believing anything that was not written in a book no matter what they saw. "For instance, although, unlike most Greek anatomists, medieval anatomists, medieval physicians dissected dead bodies, and therefore had the opportunity to correct some big mistakes in the Greek books on anatomy, instead they had the Greek books on anatomy read out loud while they dissected, and tried to describe it the way the Greeks believed it to be" (Again this rings so many bells re ME! This problem has not gone away and may even be becoming much worse as time progresses.) It also talks about how with a slow moving disease that sometimes improves for periods of time all on its own, how many different 'treatments' come to be considered useful for the condition when in reality it is all just coincidence. (This irritating phenomenon is not just particular to ME!) Society refusing to accept a new illness is not at all a phenomenon unique to M.E. either,

indeed in some ways we have been dealt with far less harshly than some sufferers of previous outbreaks of other illnesses have been. Tens of thousands of innocent Jewish people have been tortured and burned alive because they were blamed for causing plague (which was really just an excuse to escalate already existing discrimination and persecution) and people with Leprosy (Hanson's disease) have been buried alive - these are just two examples of many. It makes it feel so much less personal somehow to know that FOR CENTURIES awful things have been done to people who were unlucky enough to become ill with the 'wrong' illnesses. This book contains just enough detail to get a basic overview of all seven diseases. It also has some fascinating myth-busting facts about Leprosy, now known as Hanson's disease. It tells about how 90% of people could not get it if they tried and the other 10% would have to live with someone with the disease for years to even have the chance of getting it!! Leprosy (Hanson's) is one of the very least contagious and least deadly illnesses there is, yet people with leprosy were known as 'untouchables' and were often shunned if not actively attacked. Most of this happened merely because there was an error in translation in a religious text, which meant that the word Leprosy and the word sin were confused, and so Leprosy was seen as a sign of sin rather than of disease. People with Leprosy have even been buried alive just for having the illness. If only society had learned from this mistake... The only bad bit in this book is that it doesn't include M.E. as it very much could. This is a really interesting read to give you perhaps more insight into how diseases have been dealt with by our society - and why we all need to be cautious about what we are told about different diseases today. I recommend it to M.E. patients and also to everyone else as well. Quote: "On most days, we go about our business not thinking about our body, merely using it to get where we want to go. But when we get sick we can think of nothing but our aching head or upset stomach. We feel at the mercy of forces beyond our control. Infectious diseases have another troubling aspect: sometimes the disease comes to us from another person. This can turn the fear of disease into fear of one another. It is in this response to fear that humans have been both incredibly brave and incredibly cruel." Jodi Bassett, The Hummingbirds' Foundation for M.E.

Some people say that a book has "more than you'll ever want to know" about such and such a thing. Realistically, though, a single volume cannot contain all information on a subject. This book, *Invisible Enemies*, is not more than you'll ever want to know... it's a start to a whole new search for knowledge. After I read this, I thought I should become an epidemiologist. Though it was classified under the children's section at my local library, I was intrigued by both the cover, the description, and the title. I checked it out and read it; it contains summaries, drawings, history, stories, and

explanations of many highly infectious diseases that have plagued man throughout history--six or seven, I believe. Included are: tuberculosis, leprosy, cholera, bubonic plague, AIDS, smallpox, and malaria. Before I read this, the basis of my knowledge of smallpox was that it is mostly gone, with the exception of a few lab samples around the world. Now I know how the vaccination was developed, as well as its spread and symptoms. If diseases are something even slightly interesting to you, this is the book I would begin with.

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