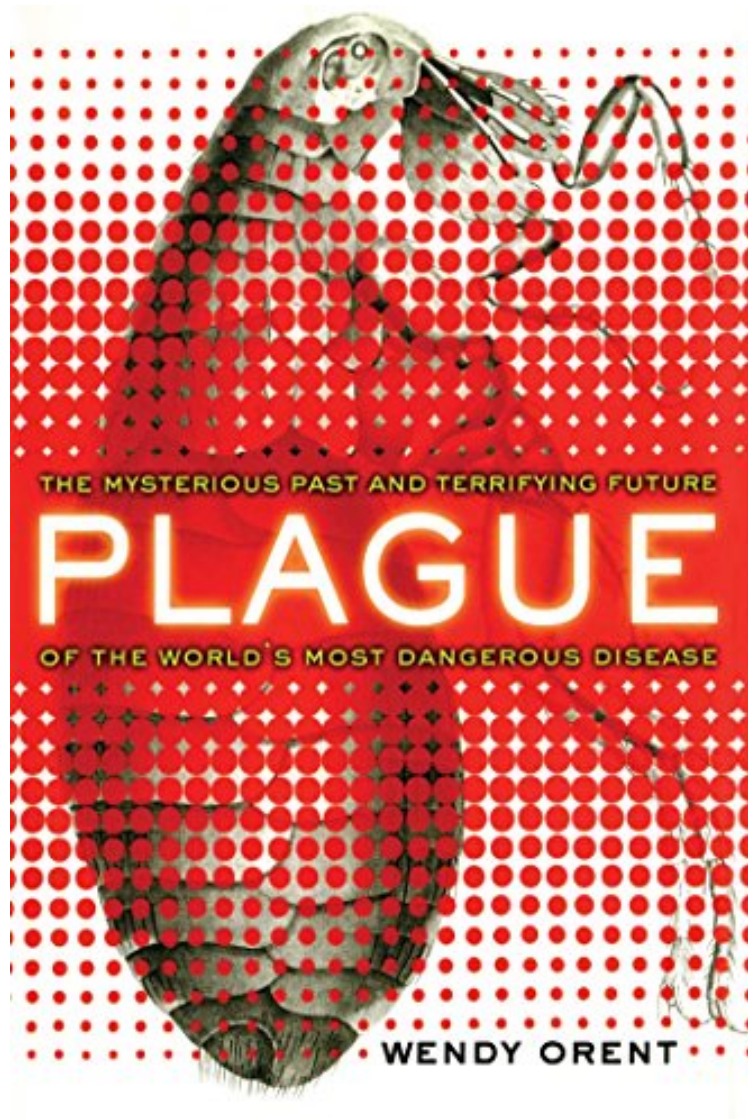


(Free pdf) Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease

# Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease

Wendy Orent

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**Wendy Orent : Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease**

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Sobering read. By William M. Collins Not for everyone, albeit, well written and researched with many insights to demographic implications of disease. 2 of 3 people found the following

review helpful. a mediocre expositionBy doc petersonWendy Orent begins *Plague* by describing her journey to a former Soviet bio-weapons lab outside Moscow, where ultra-virulent strains of bubonic plague were (and, apparently, in violation of international law, are) manufactured and stored before discussing the history of the disease and its impact on humankind and its historical role. Organizationally, this doesn't work very well. I also was frustrated by the lack of clarity she provided differentiating between the pneumonic and bubonic forms of the disease and the scientific explanations of how the same bacteria can have two different vectors. In her historical examination of the bubonic plague, she does a solid job of detailing "Justinian's Plague" in 542 and the "Great Mortality" of 1348 and subsequent significant outbreaks in 1665 and 1891, although there are several other books on the topic that do so as well (*The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time* (P.S.), *Plagues and Peoples*). What Orent also attempts to do is explore the vectors of the plague and connect the relative virulence of the disease to its animal hosts. This is not explained very well, nor are the microbiological processes that are so crucial to understanding this phenomenon. There are a number of books on the topic of plague; this is not one of the stronger ones. Orent's discussion of bio-weapons is good, but the lack of clarity in explaining the science behind the organism and its virulence makes it a lack-luster book on the disease. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Shelly CoxGreat read!

Plague is a terrifying mystery. In the Middle Ages, it wiped out 40 million people - 40 percent of the total population in Europe. Seven hundred years earlier, the Justinian Plague destroyed the Byzantine Empire and ushered in the Middle Ages. The plague of London in the seventeenth century killed more than 1,000 people a day. In the early twentieth century, plague again swept Asia, taking the lives of 12 million in India alone. Even more frightening is what it could do to us in the near future. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian scientists created genetically altered, antibiotic-resistant and vaccine-resistant strains of plague that can bypass the human immune system and spread directly from person to person. These weaponized strains still exist, and they could be replicated in almost any laboratory. Wendy Orent's *Plague* pieces together a fascinating and terrifying historical whodunit. Drawing on the latest research in labs around the world, along with extensive interviews with American and Soviet plague experts, Orent offers nothing less than a biography of a disease. Plague helped bring down the Roman Empire and close the Middle Ages; it has had a dramatic impact on our history, yet we still do not fully understand its own evolution. Orent's retelling of the four great pandemics makes for gripping reading and solves many puzzles. Why did some pandemics jump from person to person, while others relied on insects as carriers? Why are some strains more virulent than others? Orent reveals the key differences among rat-based, prairie dog-based, and marmot-based plague. The marmots of Central Asia, in particular, have long been hosts to the most virulent and frightening form of the disease, a form that can travel around the world in the blink of an eye. From its ability to hide out in the wild, only to spring back into humanity with a terrifying vengeance, to its elusive ca

.com Anthrax, smallpox, West Nile virus, mad cow disease and now Black Death? The 21st century's list of new and returning biological scourges is enough to make anyone go a little Howard Hughes. But knowledge is the best defense, and Wendy Orent's *Plague* is full of facts and educated speculations about the "world's most dangerous disease." Although always caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, plague can manifest in many ways, from a relatively benign and uncontagious infection to a potent airborne form that spreads like wildfire and kills without fail. Orent provides a gripping history of plague outbreaks around the world, such as the notorious Black Death of medieval Europe, and explains why reservoirs in rodent populations mean we will never eradicate the disease. Then, in chapters echoing recent books about smallpox and anthrax, Orent investigates the 20th century Soviet bioweapons program that focused on plague. Growing it, perfecting it, stockpiling it to use in wartime. Her insider information comes from Igor Domaradskij, a leading scientist in Soviet biological weapon development and vaccine production. In her interviews with Domaradskij, Orent allows him to show how easy it is for well-meaning scientists to shift back and forth between humanitarian and military work. *Plague* reveals the inner workings of a terrifying research effort, the products of which may or may not have been destroyed in 1992, when Boris Yeltsin ordered Soviet bioweapon labs shut down. Without resorting to alarmism, Orent cautions the world that plague is still out there, in nature and in laboratories, waiting for a chance to spread again. --Therese LittletonFrom Publishers WeeklyAs journalist Orent shows, what is called the plaguea killer of millions throughout the centuriesis several different diseases, some spread by animals, others by humans. Luckily, the Black Death, as the plague was called in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, "never became a permanent human specialist, like smallpox," in part, she surmises, because it was too virulent to survive for long. But when Orent moves on to the present and future of the plague, she's treading on uncertain ground. With the help of a former Soviet bioweapons scientist, Igor Domaradskij, whose memoirs she's edited, she throws the spotlight on the Soviet development of strains of the plague. The frightening thing, she notes, is that some of these strains can no longer be accounted for. Whether or not that is something that should be feared is unclear: American experts she quotes argue that these viruses are no longer major threats to create an epidemic. But she contends that while not as deadly as anthrax, the strains of the plague created in the former Soviet Union or other strains of the disease that might

be antibiotic resistant are indeed something to worry about. Not so long ago, a book like this might have seemed like fear mongering. In the post-September 11 world, a plague outbreak may still be unlikely, but many readers will find this a subject deserving further investigation. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist \*Starred \* Science journalist Orent's sweeping history of *Yersinia pestis* begins and ends in Russia. As the Soviet Union, Russia ran the world's largest bioweapons program, concentrated on making plague more virulent and more invincible to antiplague agents. The U.S., which ended bioweapons research during the Nixon administration, doesn't take plague as seriously as Russia but hasn't had Russia's experience with it. Plague's homeland is Mongolia and the adjacent north and west; it spread through Asia to Europe and Africa from there, and there it still flares, killing entire families and tiny communities before the most effective plague prophylaxis, quarantine, contains it. Three times plague waxed pandemic, and Orent charts its course and effects under the sixth-century Byzantine emperor Justinian, whose attempted revival of the Roman empire it quashed; in the mid-fourteenth century, devastating Europe before subsiding in waves extending to the eighteenth century; and in 1894 to 1920, especially in China, during which investigators discovered much of what is definitely known about it. Later the key to plague's dangerousness was ascertained: it disarms immune response. By the time its victim feels sick, the "liver, spleen, and lymph glands . . . are tissues of plague, plague bacteria in almost pure culture." Back at last to Russia, where, more than any stockpiled plague weapons, by now probably impotent, the knowledge of former bioweapons scientists is very much on the market. Be afraid, and remember quarantine. Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved