



Twenty-First Century Plague: The Story of SARS

Thomas Abraham

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In the autumn of 2002 in southern China, a previously unknown virus jumped the species barrier from animal to man and sparked the first global epidemic of the new century. The disease sped along the air routes of a globalized world, spreading within months to thirty-one countries on every continent.

Before it was reined in by a remarkable international scientific effort, the SARS virus demonstrated human society's vulnerability to disease. New infectious diseases like SARS have been emerging at an alarming rate over the past few decades. There is every indication the world will continue to face new viral diseases, some of them much more lethal and contagious than SARS.

This book traces the emergence of SARS, in the process examining the global politics and economics of disease. It provides the first behind-the-scenes account of how the global battle against SARS was fought and the incredible research efforts that finally led to identification of the virus.

Drawing on unprecedented access to scientists, doctors, and recovered patients, Thomas Abraham recounts the pressures and heartbreaks suffered by brave researchers who battled the clock to solve the SARS puzzle?even as colleagues and friends succumbed to the disease.

"The caller at the other end of the phone was from the Manila office of the World Health Organization (WHO), and his message was alarming. Flying over the Atlantic Ocean on a Singapore Airlines flight was a critically ill man who had to be hospitalized in an isolation ward as soon as possible... There were over 300 passengers on the jet, which was bound for Singapore via Frankfurt, and unless the man was taken off the plane, they were all in danger."

"On March 15, while David Heymann and his team were toiling away on their global travel alert in Geneva, a 72-year-old man boarded Air China flight 112 from Hong Kong to Beijing... Not only was he sick, he also happened to be a super-spreader of the disease. From his seat, 14E, he infected 21 other passengers and crew members."

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