

The Hot Zone Book Summary, by Richard Preston

by Allen Cheng

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY3XnKizHbU>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yzWgfnj8eY

1-Page Summary of The Hot Zone

Overview

The Hot Zone is a book that tells the true story of an Ebola virus outbreak in Reston, Virginia. Preston describes how other viruses have spread around the world, particularly in Africa where some were more devastating than others. He also explains how AIDS was a virus whose effects on humans are still being measured and explored.

The book begins with the exposure and death of a French expat in Kenya due to Marburg. The author describes his symptoms and bloody death in extreme detail, giving you an immediate sense of what it's like to be exposed to this virus. Then he provides background information about how the first outbreak occurred at a vaccine factory in Germany.

In the next few chapters, Preston describes two outbreaks of Ebola. The first is a Sudan strain of the disease that strikes a quiet storekeeper named Yu G. and spreads throughout his district. Later on, an even more deadly outbreak occurs when dirty needles are used at a medical clinic in various villages across Zaire (now known as Congo). Both outbreaks cause hundreds of deaths, but Preston provides particular details about Mayinga N., who contracts Ebola while working in Ngalemia Hospital and dies after being quarantined in Kinshasa for two days.

In the book, Preston describes several outbreaks of filoviruses and their effects on different people. He also focuses on a few American scientists who work with these viruses in order to learn more about them. Two of these scientists are Nancy Jaax and her husband, Peter Jahrling. They both work at Fort Detrick in Maryland as Army veterinarians specializing in hot agents (deadly viruses). One day while performing an experiment involving Ebola, Nancy's space suit rips open and she almost gets exposed to it. Several years later, some monkeys at Reston die from a new strain of Ebola that has never been seen before; this is when Nancy first encounters it again. The United States Army along with the Centers for Disease Control then contain the virus so that it doesn't spread to humans by moving all infected monkeys into an isolated facility where they can be studied without infecting anyone else.

A team of scientists enters a Reston facility to euthanize hundreds of monkeys. They also collect samples from the monkeys and disinfect the facility. The operation is difficult because it involves people in space suits, sedating monkeys, and dealing with an escaped monkey who bites one scientist. After all this work, they find out that Ebola Reston kills only monkeys but has no symptoms in humans.

The author visited Kitum Cave, a tourist spot in Kenya where two victims of the Marburg virus had been before getting sick. Scientists previously had not been able to find the source of the disease, but Preston wanted to visit and see if he could figure it out.

"In the Shadow of Mount Elgon" (pp. 1-47)

The book begins with several pages of large-type text to give the reader a sense of what it's like to enter a Biosafety level 4 lab. The author uses this technique so that readers can experience first-hand what it would be like to enter one.

In the first chapter of *The Hot Zone*, a Frenchman named Charles Monet decides to take a trip to Mount Elgon in Kenya. He invites one of his lovers from the village to go with him on this trip. They explore Kitum Cave, which contains crystals and mummified animals among other things.

Monet develops a headache after visiting Kitum Cave. His back also hurts, and he stays home from work for three days. He has a fever and vomits uncontrollably for two days straight. Monet becomes sullen with his housekeeper, who fears that he's turning into a zombie because of the yellowish color of his skin and red eyes.

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