



# Beating Back the Devil: On the Front Lines with the Disease Detectives of

*Maryn McKenna*

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## **Beating Back the Devil: On the Front Lines with the Disease Detectives of Maryn McKenna**

The universal human instinct is to run from an outbreak of disease like Ebola. These doctors run toward it. Their job is to stop epidemics from happening.

They are the disease detective corps of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the federal agency that tracks and tries to prevent disease outbreaks and bioterrorist attacks around the world. They are formally called the Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS)—a group founded more than fifty years ago out of fear that the Korean War might bring the use of biological weapons—and, like intelligence operatives in the traditional sense, they perform their work largely in anonymity. They are not household names, but over the years they were first to confront the outbreaks that became known as hantavirus, Ebola, and AIDS. Every day they work to protect us by hunting down the deadly threats that we forget until they dominate our headlines, West Nile virus, anthrax, and SARS among others.

In this riveting narrative, Maryn McKenna—the only journalist ever given full access to the EIS in its fifty-three-year history—follows the first class of disease detectives to come to the CDC after September 11, the first to confront not just naturally occurring outbreaks but the man-made threat of bioterrorism. They are talented researchers—many with young families—who trade two years of low pay and extremely long hours for the chance to be part of the group that are on the frontlines, in the yellow suits and masks, that has helped eradicate smallpox, push back polio, and solve the first major outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease, toxic shock syndrome, and *E. coli* O157 and works to battle every new disease before it becomes an epidemic.

Urgent, exhilarating, and compelling, *Beating Back the Devil* takes you inside the world of these medical detectives who are trying to stop the next epidemic—before the epidemics stop us.

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