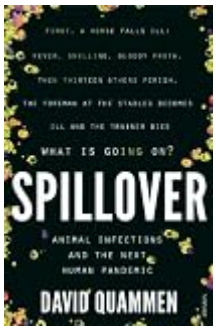
BOOKS I HAVE READ: SPILLOVER

Posted on October 13, 2013 by Eddie

Category: Reviews



I don't think I've ever met a virus I didn't like. Let me clarify that; I don't actually like being infected by viruses and I'm very aware of the devastation they can wreak, but they are absolutely fascinating. If you don't think viruses are extraordinary; you haven't studied them!

If you would like to know more about viruses (and some bacteria and fungi) thenÂ Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human PandemicÂ would be a great place to start. As the title indicates, it is a book about diseases which have carried over from animals to humans. Some of these diseases are well known; malaria, AIDS, others such as hendra are hardly known by the general public.

SpilloverÂ takes us on a journey through the world of zoonotic infections (ones acquired from animals); telling the stories of the scientists who worked on these diseases and the ordinary people who suffered from them. The book gets into hard science and statistics at points, but these 'difficult bits' are interspersed with very accessible story telling. For my part, I thoroughly enjoyed the sections which were set in parts of the world I know. There is an excellent tableau about travel in SE Cameroon, which will have many of my colleagues smiling with recognition. Linked to this, the recreation of the early spread of the HIV virus is as fascinating and well told as it is speculative.

For the most part, the book concentrates on known zoonotic diseases and little space is given to as yet undiscovered (or evolved) pathogens. If you want an introduction to 'the next big one'; I wouldn't start here.

We are forever being told that we need to read Shakespeare and Dickens if we are to consider ourselves educated. I would argue that we also need to have more than a nodding understanding of science. You can't be an educated person if you have no idea of what causes diseases and how they can be treated.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book, but at a little over 500 pages, it isn't for the faint hearted. If nothing else it will develop the strength of your forearms!