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Mad Dogs: The New Rabies Plague (Louise Lindsey Merrick Natural Environment Series)

Donald Finley

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Rabies, one of humanity's most ancient and feared diseases, has swept through Texas in one of the most dangerous outbreaks in decades. Normally timid coyotes have become fearless, challenging ranch dogs twice their size, attacking an infant on her porch swing, menacing oil field workers. More ominously, they have infected hundreds of pet dogs, resulting in some fifteen hundred people in South Texas exposed to the dreaded disease.

While South Texas copes with the effects of this outbreak, another has infected raccoons from Florida to New York, turning those toylike and benign creatures vicious.

The United States, with the world's most complex rabies problems, seems helpless to resolve them—despite the fact Europe and Canada have mounted successful and ongoing oral rabies vaccination programs. Controversy remains over who will pay for a federally approved vaccine, since the United States considers rabies a local health problem, though the virus knows no state lines or international boundaries.

In 1995, the USDA granted permission to drop an experimental, genetically engineered vaccine over nearly fifteen thousand square miles of South Texas brushlands in an effort to stop the spread of the disease.

In *Mad Dogs: The New Rabies Plague*, Don Finley chronicles the epidemic, the politics of response to it, and the most ambitious American attempt yet to erect a barrier against the disease—in Texas. He tells the stories of those who have been plagued by rabies, and those who have accepted the charge to end the plague.

Finley's straightforward language, free of either jargon or hysteria, is a welcome approach in describing the disease's destructive effects. His rare inside look into the politics and the science of disease control within public bureaucracies will engross those interested in science and public health issues, pet owners and wildlife enthusiasts, and those fascinated by infectious disease threats.

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