

Heroes & Scoundrels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of the Nobel Prize in Medicine

Moira Dolan

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One of the greatest rewards of winning the Nobel Prize in Medicine is the authority it bestows on the winner. But in *Heroes & Scoundrels*, medical historian Moira Dolan encourages healthy skepticism toward pronouncements from medical experts—even if they're Nobel Prize winners.

This second volume in the Boneheads and Brainiacs series features lively biographies of Nobel Prize winners from 1951 to 1975 and reveals the “sidelined players,” most of them women, who did much of the prize-winning research themselves, or in partnership with the (almost always) white man who claimed the prize. As entertaining and sometimes disturbing as they are informative, the biographies reveal that two winners were Nazis, one was an American racist, and several engaged in unethical behavior, failed to take responsibility for mistakes, or committed outright fraud in their laboratories. Side by side with these are stories of scientists who did their research while working as resistance fighters during World War II or who became political or academic refugees and escaped the hell of war to make immense contributions to their new countries.

The book's descriptions of the research processes employed by the prizewinners are fascinating and accessible. It also presents frightening evidence of lax security and containment in laboratories involved in creating supervirulent viruses and antibiotic-resistant bacteria capable of killing off large populations. In a powerful exposé, the book reveals instances of lab workers engaged in such research who attested to their use of protective gear and adherence to correct protocols but who still became infected and infected others. It also gives proof of a past lack of informed consent in vaccine research.

In exposing the good, the bad, and the ugly among Nobel Prize-winning scientists, *Heroes & Scoundrels* comes as a timely, necessary warning against accepting the pronouncements of medical “experts” without question.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2022)

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