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The Devil's Pitchfork: A Derek Stillwater Novel

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> *'When human beings steal the devil's pitchfork, they don't destroy it. They think by stealing it they've stopped the devil … Instead, you've become the devil … Congratulations.'*

"Devil's pitchfork" is what Derek Stillwater, troubleshooter for the Department of Homeland Security, calls super bugs—viruses strong enough to kill thousands. Stillwater throws his accusation at the head of a government biological warfare research center, which has created Chimera, a Level 4 the most deadly) bio-engineered virus. Like its mythological namesake, it is a monster of devastating parents—hepatitis, bubonic plague, and Ebola—with the ability to kill within twenty-four hours. Terrorists have just stolen the virus. Worse yet, since the center only created it to see if it was possible for terrorists to do so, there is no vaccine or anti-viral. As experts from other government agencies work frantically to discover a vaccine, Stillwater fights against known and unknown enemies to find and retrieve the virus.

When he hears a voice from his past on a tape recording at the murder scene of a research center scientist, Stillwater suspects that the leader of the terrorists, called Fallen, is a man believed to be dead, Richard Coffee. Coffee, who served with Stillwater during Desert Storm, supposedly died as a result of gas poisoning. As Stillwater follows his former friend's trail of death and destruction, of threats and tricks, he wonders if the nerve gas and Coffee's time as an undercover agent for the CIA in Chechnya have damaged his mind.

Writers are often advised to write what they know. This author, a microbiologist with experience in tissue and cell culturing, has done that with frightening effectiveness, promising sleepless nights for his readers. Reminiscent of recent terrorist acts in the news, Terry's tale stirs together a sense of imminent death and destruction for thousands across the globe, a conspiracy that involves people in the upper echelons of government, and discord and disagreement between the very agencies, like the FBI and the military, meant to help save the world. He keeps the nightmare real and personal as Stillwater fights his own panic attacks before each exposure to a bio-hazardous situation, and an attractive scientist who participated in the creation of Chimera fights for her life after inadvertently infecting herself with the virus.

Terry is a freelance writer, editor, and novelist his previous books include *Dirty Deeds: A Meg Malloy Mystery* and a collection of novellas). Here, he successfully writes a truly scary scenario, but what's even more frightening is that the events are all too possible, including the terrorists' plan to spread the virus by means of soda cans carried on to airplanes heading to different countries. It makes the reader wonder—and worry—about how much fact is in this author's fiction, and just who has control of the devil's pitchfork.
(August 18, 2009)

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