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Book review

Six-legged soldiers: using insects as weapons of warfare. Jeffrey A Lockwood. Publisher: Oxford University Press Inc, New York. Publication: 2009. Pages: 400. Illustrations: 50. Price: \$27.95 (Hardcover), \$17.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 9780195333053.

“This is the tale of one of history’s most potent military alliances: the intelligence of humans and the power of insects.”

The practice of using insects for the purpose of warfare is no new practice and today, we have improvised upon those strategies our cave-dwelling forefathers had conceived. *Six-legged soldiers: using insects as weapons of warfare*, is a fascinating book on this subject and can easily be called a treatise of the evolution of entomological warfare. It has been lucidly written by Jeffery A Lockwood, Professor of Natural Sciences and Humanities at the University of Wyoming, in an inimitable style ensuring that this 400-page book is as absorbing as any top-rated novel.

Reconstruction of history is always an arduous task and Lockwood amalgamates the skill of story-telling with data. Each chapter is tastefully titled, in keeping with the general paradigm of dry humour that underlies the entire book. Although the book is tantalising and mentally stimulating, its USP possibly lies in the fact that it is chillingly real; it is not a fantasy fiction but is what actually happened to someone, somewhere and ... yes, could happen again.

The book paints vivid pictures of entomological warfare down the ages: of Palaeolithic man, who flung nests of bees

into enemy caves to force foes out of hiding; of Egyptians, who deified insects for their extreme courage, selfless sacrifice, and commitment to their kin under the worst circumstances that could push a brawnier opponent into retreat. It then describes the times of the World Wars, of Hitler smuggling Colorado beetles into England farms, the Japanese stocking up *Yersinia pestis* infected fleas to be bombed on the enemy but ending up facing the brunt of their own bugs when security measures broke down, and this is said to have cost Japan more lives than the atomic bombing. The last chapter outlines future trends in entomological warfare: all the sci-fi comes true—fusion of bioengineering and entomology to design biotechnological bugs (appropriately called “robotflies”). An entomologist’s delight, to be sure!

Entomological warfare may be re-defined after reading this and may finally get its due importance. This book’s bottom-line is that one does not need high tech bombs for destruction; some very cleverly manipulated commonplace insects will do the job just as well. It is a wake-up call for all. This reasonably priced book is useful for academicians, public health specialists, entomologists, researchers, and all those engaged in literary pursuits. In fact, a highly recommended page turner for people from all walks of life, particularly the military.

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