

# Review of *The Cure: A Thriller* by Bradlee Frazer

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As a culture, we are engrossed by plagues that ravage our communities, as evidenced by the plethora of literature that delves into the fear of enemies invisible to the naked eye. There have been many stories of postapocalyptic worlds caused by rapidly spreading viruses, and there are sure to be many more given the present environment. The culprit in Bradlee Frazer's thriller, *The Cure*, is named "Tripanovirus Lite," which pays homage to Stephen King's deadly virus, "Captain Trips." *The Cure* is unique among its genre for its description of the problematic nature of medicine as a business. Written in 2012, *The Cure* perhaps foreshadows the danger of capitalism in the current COVID-19 pandemic, making its themes especially relevant to today's reader.

The book opens with Dr. Marcus visiting The Complex, which is a remote treatment center in the barren desert of Arizona where he carries out experimental drug trials for Porter Pharmaceuticals. We learn of the doctor's internal struggle as a young woman suddenly dies in front of him while receiving the therapy. Dr. Marcus becomes torn when he must treat a nine-year-old girl named Jenny with the faulty medication that has proven to be lethal because Porter will not let him stop the trial. Dr. Marcus complies given his own messy past with pushing drugs to market preemptively.

The focus changes when Jason, an unassuming health nut, recovers from the virus, which up to this point has been 100% fatal by causing the bones to weaken until they disintegrate. Porter pays Jason sparingly while they drain his blood in order to isolate more of the factor that is the only known cure. On the verge of death himself, Jason struggles with the question of who lives and who dies. Throughout the novel, as in the real world, the

power shifts from the pharmaceutical company to the doctor to the patients themselves and back again. Who wins in the end is determined by the virus.

The book was engaging with its interspersing of divorces, contracts with loopholes, and the occasional manhunt. In the race to find a cure, money, egos, and lives are at stake, and Frazer portrays these themes with acumen. He also reveals the rough intersection between science and business and allows the reader to see multiple perspectives. Porter, who is cast as the obvious villain, educates Dr. Marcus on the financial paradox of finding the cure. If they were to make the therapy widely available, the businessman explains, "Three things would happen: first, [the virus] would be eradicated. Second, we'd generate tremendous good will. Third, we'd all be out of business and broke. All that good will and a dollar bill wouldn't even get us a cup of coffee."

Frazer also begins to explore important issues such as how we make impossible decisions about who gets life-saving resources when demand is greater than supply. He demonstrates that we are naturally swayed by the stories and people sitting in front of us, as Jason was touched by a sweet curly-haired girl who was dying. More development of these themes at the end, especially Jason's turmoil from knowing he was the only source of the cure for people inflicted with the virus, would have strengthened the narrative. How does one man bear the burden of these decisions when the need becomes overwhelming? Frazer suggests it comes down to money. In our current crisis, we have turned to developing criteria to objectively determine care, which is similarly unfair given the breadth of inequities in our systems.

Unfortunately, pandemics are as timeless as the literature that portrays them. There will always be fear and there will always be money to be made. *The Cure* details a lawyer's perspective of a pandemic and would be enjoyed by medical professionals and laypersons alike. It shows the good and evil of drug development and how the line between the two is almost never straightforward. We are reminded of the hard truths of health as a business in which doctors often find their hands tied,

and Porter teaches us lessons along the way: "People don't buy drugs. They buy hope." He knows we could all use a little hope right now.

**Conflict of interest**

The author has no conflict of interest to report.