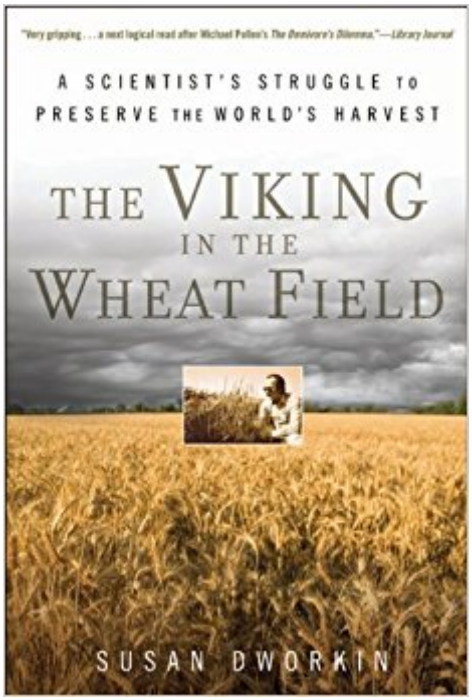
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The Viking In The Wheat Field: A Scientist's Struggle To Preserve The World's Harvest



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Synopsis

For thirty years, Danish plant scientist Bent Skovmand served as adviser to dozens of countries and hunted for seeds with genes to resist disease and such environmental stresses as drought, flooding, and global warming. In an era when multinational corporations often jealously guarded patents on plant breeding, Skovmand fought to keep his seed bank a free, open scientific exchange for breeders and farmers everywhere. By telling the story of Skovmand and his colleagues, The Viking in the Wheat Field sheds welcome light on an agricultural sector--plant genetic resources--on which our food supply is crucially dependent.

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Customer Reviews

The visionary Danish plant scientist and pioneering seed banker Bent Skovmand found his calling at the University of Minnesota, following in the footsteps of Dr. Norman Borlaug, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for launching the green revolution. Borlaug brought Skovmand to the Center for Improvement of Maize and Wheat in Mexico in 1976. There Skovmand, concerned about the perils of monoculture and global warming and the patenting of plant genetic resources by corporations, began his quest to create what Dworkin calls Ã¢â ¬Å“agricultureÃ¢â ¬â„¢s public library.Ã¢â ¬Â• He spearheaded an international effort to collect and preserve as many crop seeds as possible and make them available to farmers the world over. Skovmand went on to direct Nordgen, which manages the so-called Doomsday Vault, where crop seeds are banked in case of a catastrophe. Dworkin vividly portrays Skovmand and a remarkable group of similarly ardent plant protectors;

crisply relates little-known yet compelling, frequently dicey tales of agricultural discovery and rescue; and explains with passion and acuity why itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s so very important to preserve the planetÃ¢â ¬â„¢s plant genetics. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ã¢â ¬Å“In vivid language, Dworkin presents Skovmand's legacy as ample reason for a new generation of genetic researchers to take the cause.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Kirkus ReviewsÃ¢â ¬Å“An eye-opening look into the little-known world of gene banks and crop breeding, and a poignant reminder that the real guardians of our food security are not armies or transnational corporations, but a handful of tireless scientists who have labored for decades to keep us one step ahead of famine.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Rowan Jacobsen, author of Fruitless Fall and The Living ShoreÃ¢â ¬Å“Susan Dworkin has found a delightful way to tell the alarming story of the fragility of the global wheat crop. She leads us expertly and enthusiastically into Bent Skovmand's strange, infrequently penetrated domain of plant breeding and international seed banks, a world in which unsung scientists search and save exotic plant germplasm to protect the staffs of life against pests, plagues and corporate raiders. As the Viking himself warns in Dworkin's book, Ã¢â ¬Ëœlf the seeds disappear, so could your food. So could you.'Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Peter Pringle, author of Food Inc., Mendel to Monsanto--The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest, and The Murder of Nikolai VavilovÃ¢â ¬Å“Thanks to Bent Skovmand and scientists of his ilk, most of us take it for granted that there will be food on table when needed. The Viking in the Wheat Field is about the importance of protecting nature and its biodiversity, and improving the seeds available to us, so that 3 billion more people may eat 40 years from now.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â ¢Per Pinstrup-Andersen, H.E. Babcock Professor of Food, Nutrition and Public Policy at Cornell University

Most of us think of the Irish potato famine as a plague of a bygone era, or as a result just of horrid and treacherous 19th century British imperial policy. Yet the biological element, a plant disease, looms closer than we might think.Susan Dworkin's The Viking in The Wheat Field tells the story of a small core of dedicated plant scientists who breed and preserve grain seeds adapted to resist crop-devastating disease, to thrive in hostile growing conditions and to increase bounty to levels only dreamt of before the 20th century.The focus for presenting the story is a charismatic Dane, Bent Skovand, a plant scientist passionately dedicated to feeding the hungry -- not in soup kitchens and shelters -- but by working to ensure abundant grain harvests worldwide.I had never before known of the fragility of our grain harvests to disease and climate. As I read I wanted to follow

Bent’s life. In doing do I was carried through the lessons of grain breeding and preservation, including the trips to the world’s most remote places such as the Himalayas and beyond the Arctic Circle to gather and preserve rare local grains and chart their properties. The book has a few technical parts, but just enough to allow the reader to be carried knowledgeably through the story.Understanding the fragility of the world’s grain crops sensitizes one to the importance of environmental preservation. Other hot topics covered include food irradiation and the legal policy of granting patents for life forms (seeds). Might such patents give private multi-national corporations power to influence or control food production? After having gouged our bank accounts will they now "take the food off our plates?"For others like me, uninitiated in the subject, this book is a real eye opener, one that taught me to be sensitive to an aspect of the world I took for granted -- that abundant food is always readily available. I suspect that is how most see it. For me The Viking in the Wheat Field was a learning experience in an area to which I had previously given little and but casual thought. So I enthusiatically recommend the highly readible story of grain and of Bent Skovand, a man who spent years in grain fields, gathering and building the world’s grain knowledge and breeding new varieties. He fought the bureaucrats, adapted to the politicians, but always with the goal of eliminating hunger. He was knighted for his work by the Queen of Denmark. He died too young. So, Good night, Sir Bent, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

This is a fascinating and well written book, but the kindle version has so many typos that reading it can sometimes become a chore as the reader has to break stride to figure out what things like "Rock ef eller" means. Proper names are repeatedly hyphenated and then in different places. Rockefeller is one example; another is Damania which comes up Da-mania, Dama-nia, Damani-a.... There are seemingly hundreds of acronyms and I quickly lost comprehension of them. One random page makes use of CIMMYT, IRRI, CG, ICARDA.The biggest problem, however, seems to me to be the sloppiness with which the kindle edition is done. It clearly hasn’t been proof read by a native English speaking proof reader. needs to get on top of this with the kindle editions.

It clearly showed the massive amount of work scientists did to produce enough food to help feed the world. It was written in a manner that made reading the book enjoyable and entertaining. A very well-written book worth reading.

Interesting & well researched

Doomsday vaults in Norway, wheat rust that threatens the food supply of Asia, mismanagement of global food stock seed banks.....Susan Dworkin has written a compelling science-based must-read for anyone around the world who is is interested in knowing who decides what we eat, how food stock decisions are made, and how to feed the world where we find ever-increasing hunger, in a time that climate change has brought drought to critical food-growing areas of Australia and Africa. "The Viking in the Wheat Field" introduces a fascinating cast of characters from many countries engaged in the global food drama, including a Nobel prize winner, and the Gates Foundation, with a particular focus on one man's story, who dedicated his life to protecting the seeds.Susan Dworkin has moved over the years from fiction, plays, biography and novel writing back to agricultural policy, having first started her career as a staff member in the Department of Agriculture during the Kennedy era. Her focus on seed science is leavened by a compelling story. I found this is an important book and read it twice: once for an orientation to a world of germplasm politics and scenarios, and then again for the narrative. I was not aware of what was at stake until I was introduced to the field through Dworkin's work.

Often it is not the politicians or the heads of governments who control the destiny of millions. Scientists work diligently in a corner without any fanfare or brouhaha. And more often than not, they make a big difference to the quality of life of the resource depleted nations. The Viking in the Wheat Field is a story of one such individual to tried hard to make a difference and nearly succeeded. The book is a must read for all wheat scientists and plant explorers and gives useful information about the environment in which the green revolution wheats were created.

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