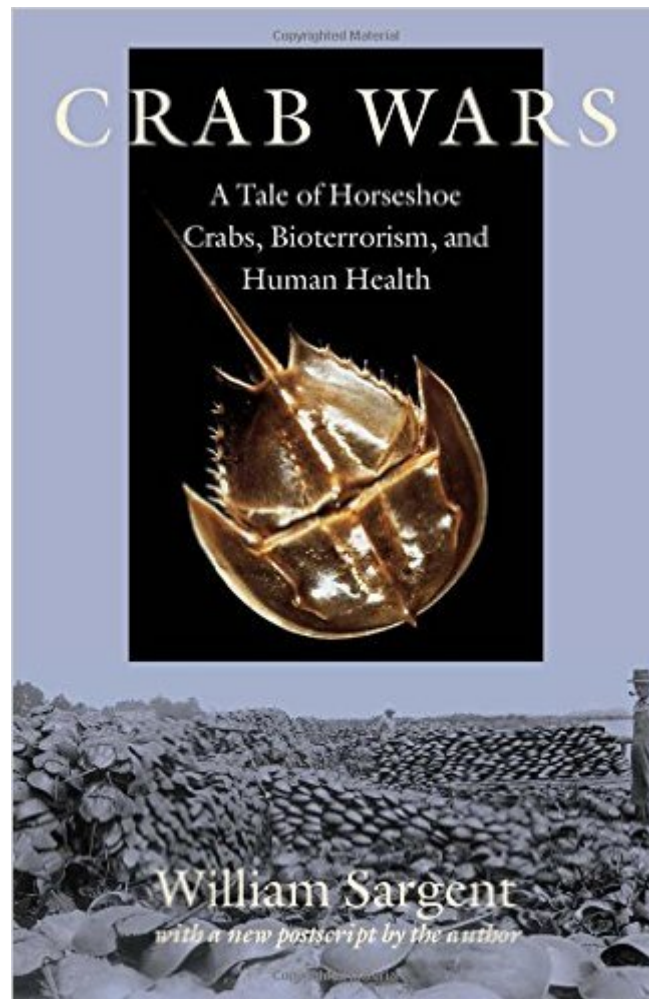


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Crab Wars: A Tale Of Horseshoe Crabs, Bioterrorism, And Human Health



Synopsis

Surviving almost unmolested for 300 million years, the horseshoe crab is now the object of an intense legal and ethical struggle involving marine biologists, environmentalists, US government officials, biotechnologists, and international corporations. The source of this friction is the discovery 25 years ago that the blood of these ancient creatures serves as the basis for the most reliable test for the deadly and ubiquitous gram-negative bacteria. These bacteria are responsible for life-threatening diseases like meningitis, typhoid, E. coli, Legionnaire's Disease and toxic shock syndrome. Because every drug certified by the FDA must be tested using the horseshoe crab derivative known as Limulus lysate, a multimillion dollar industry has emerged involving the license to bleed horseshoe crabs and the rights to their breeding grounds. Since his youthful fascination with these ancient creatures, William Sargent has spent much of his life observing, studying, and collecting horseshoe crabs. As a result, he presents a thoroughly accessible insider's guide to the discovery of the lysate test, the exploitation of the crabs at the hands of multinational pharmaceutical conglomerates, local fishing interests, and the legal and governmental wrangling over the creature's ultimate fate. In the end, the story of the horseshoe crab is a sobering reflection on the unintended consequences of scientific progress and the danger of self-regulated industries controlling a limited natural resource.

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Customer Reviews

What if there was a special formula for a product that would detect Gram-negative bacteria (many of

these bacteria cause disease) that was easy to use and make? What would this formula be worth, and how important would it be if it preserved all the ingredients so that it can be used in perpetuity? The formula exists: Limulus amoebocyte lysate, a compound found in the blood of the horseshoe crab. In *Crab Wars*, author William Sargent reviews briefly the history of the discovery of this lysate, the emerging industry associated with bleeding horseshoe crabs for medical research and public health, the ongoing harvesting of crabs for bait, and especially the legal wrangling of those making money (lots of it) from crab harvesting and bleeding, the state and federal regulators and managers of the ocean regions home to horseshoe crabs, and (even more briefly) the role of horseshoe crabs in ecosystem processes. Sargent is a horseshoe crab advocate, and the flavor of the book is one that discourages overexploitation (he believes in exploitation, particularly because of the importance of the lysate in medicine). As sympathetic as I am to ocean conservation issues, I have to admit that *Crab Wars* was uneven in its approach to horseshoe crab conservation. It really didn't make a case for the importance of horseshoe crabs in oceanic and terrestrial ecosystems (mentioning it isn't the same as making a case). It seemed to vilify horseshoe crab users while making conservationists saintly. There are many, many ocean species being overexploited. To delve into the horseshoe crab story, I expected a deeper, richer review. Books like *Voyage of the Turtle* (by Carl Safina) and *Cod* (by Mark Kurlansky) come to mind. *Crab Wars* was not of this caliber. However, if you look at the websites of horseshoe crab exploitation apologists, you certainly won't find a balanced discussion of the issues. In fact, apologists state "The companies that produce [lysate] go to great lengths to ensure that the animals used in the making of this valuable, life-saving test are handled with care and respect." When Sargent discusses bled crabs leaving the labs and heading right to the fishing boats to be chopped up for bait, the "...handled with care and respect..." statement doesn't ring true (although I certainly have no idea whether this practice continues today). So *Crab Wars* is an imperfect start in learning more about the use, and abuse, of horseshoe crabs.

The previous reviewer must have a big ax to grind! His ad hominem attack on the author is outrageous, and ridiculous! I have both a medical research background, and lived many years near the Atlantic Ocean. Horseshoe crabs were once so common, you practically tripped over them, now they are virtually nonexistent! Horseshoe crabs are in such big trouble that the Governors of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia have drastically reduced the allowable catch off their shores! The situation has deteriorated to the point that the Audubon Society is concerned about the potential extinction of certain migrating birds, which are dependent on Horseshoe crab eggs! Should we just sit on our hands in order to keep one tiny, and economically insignificant industry - whose

sole purpose is to turn these ancient, and medically priceless, creatures into bait - happy? Sorry! No way! These offshore waters belong to all of us! They are not anyone's private domain to destroy at one's leisure for monetary gain!

could have used a bit more history with the book but good background on how the biomedical industry developed on the east coast

This book appears to be largely the product of one man's personal agenda. Readers should use extreme caution in reading and using the "information" in this book. I encourage every reader who is seriously interested in horseshoe crabs to follow up by fact-checking with research scientists, biologists, and local conservation groups-there are many involved with horseshoe crabs. Hence, there is information available on horseshoe crabs from reliable and reputable primary sources. Before spending your money here..do your homework! and before acting on anything in this book, find the truth for yourself from those who do scientific research, who have dedicated their lives to studying these unique animals, and who take a pragmatic and scientific approach to conservation without manipulating the public with overly emotional and inflammatory propaganda. After that, if you are still curious, check it out from the library first...you'll thank me later.

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