



The Real Story of Risk: Adventures in a Hazardous World

Glenn Croston

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We live in a world of risk. It waits for us in our refrigerator and surrounds us on the freeway. It's lurking in our arteries and sitting in our 401(k) accounts. Given that we deal with risk on a constant basis, we should be good at it; as it turns out, though, we're not. We're blind to common risks like heart disease (one in five deaths), but we shrink in fear from rare events like shark attacks (one in a million) and airplane crashes (one in twenty thousand). What accounts for our poor ability to perceive and react to the risks that really matter?

Starting from an evolutionary perspective, the author traces our distorted perception of risk back to our ancestors, reminding readers that we are all the culmination of a long line of survivors who fought life-and-death threats such as attacks from wild animals, starvation, and disease. The fact that we have covered Earth with seven billion people is a testament to our skill at overcoming these risks. But our spectacular success has also produced our contemporary artificial world with new threats like climate change, chili dogs, and online gambling. Our brains, which evolved to deal with the ancient world, are ill equipped to process the new threats we face.

Croston examines the many facets of our hazardous modern environment that we only dimly perceive. He explains why we let our guard down for a beautiful face, why slow-moving risks (like rising seas) are hard to stop, how a good story (though false) can be more persuasive than dry statistics (even alarming ones), what we fear even more than death, and many other intriguing quirks about our built-in incompetence to adequately handle present-day risks.

Offering a wealth of fascinating information about health, sex, money, safety, food, and the environment, this book illuminates an often-misunderstood but crucial aspect of daily life.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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