



The River (Little, Brown),
an exhaustive but quite

readable tome that is part travelogue, part scientific inquiry, part investigative journalism. Hooper tries to establish what a panel of scientists convened in 1992 could not—that HIV spread from chimps to man in contaminated experimental polio vaccines that were tested in Africa. He comes close—very close—but falls short of the smoking-gun evidence that would put the issue to rest.

Hooper re-creates the early days of polio-vaccine research and weaves this narrative into the story of HIV's origins, which is pretty solid until it hits Africa. HIV can be traced back to bustling villages along the Congo River in the 1950s. From there, however,

coincide a
of the poli
there is no
African ch
vaccines, c
fected wit

Which
where he s
question a
half-centu
much hard
the origina
time may l
analysis w

Still, H
vain. We k
chimps to
ly how cou
fective trea
someday, a