

# Germ Warrior

RUTGERS MICROBIOLOGIST DOUBTS THAT THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING.

While most Americans were vacationing, IZonstantin Severinov spent part of his summer in the remote village of Obolensk, trying to gain access to the site of a scaled-down Russian bioweapons complex. Severinov, an assistant professor at Rutgers' Waksman Institute of Microbiology and a native of Estonia, went there armed with \$2.5 million in grants from the Pentagon's

Defense Threat Reduction Agency to recruit Russian microbiologists to join his 10-person lab. Severinov among a half-dozen researchers chosen by the National Academy of Sciences to pursue projects with bioweapons experts in Russia and former Soviet republics found

the climate for cooperative

SEVERINOV

HAD ALSO HOPED TO

DETERMINE WHAT

GERMS THE

FORMER SOVIET

UNION POSSESSED.

threat reduction as chilly as an ice-fishing expedition in Siberia. Since 1997, the U.S. has given about \$100 million to 3,500 microbiologists in the former Soviet Union-people who otherwise might be tempted to do business with rogue states or terrorists.

Despite the obstacles, Severinov has been told by Pentagon officials to submit a grant proposal for a three-year, \$700,000 anthrax study

with the Russians. He is particularly interested in bacteriophages, phages for short, which are microscopic viruses that latch onto bacteria and inject their DNA. Once inside, they multiply until their host explodes.

