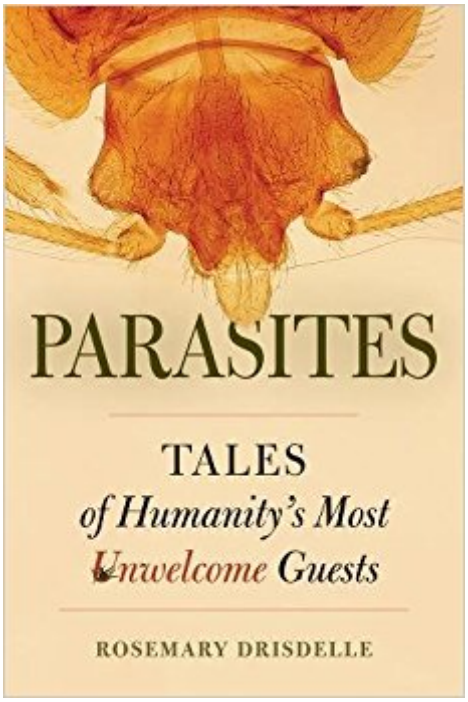
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# Parasites: Tales Of Humanity's Most Unwelcome Guests




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## Synopsis

Hidden away within living tissues, parasites are all around us--and inside us. Yet, despite their unsavory characteristics, as we find in this compulsively readable book, parasites have played an enormous role in civilizations through time and around the globe. Parasites: Tales of Humanity's Most Unwelcome Guests puts amoebae, roundworms, tapeworms, mites, and others at the center of the action as human cultures have evolved and declined. It shows their role in exploration, war, and even terrorist plots, often through an unpredictable ripple effect. It reveals them as invisible threats in our food, water, and luggage; as invaders that have shaped behaviors and taboos; and as unexpected partners in such venues as crime scene investigations. Parasites also describes their evolution and life histories and considers their significant benefits. Deftly blending the sociological with the scientific, this natural and social history of parasites looks closely at a fascinating, often disgusting group of organisms and discovers that they are in fact an integral thread in the web of life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As Drisdelle, a clinical parasitologist, shows, human parasites come in many forms and use a panoply of strategies to make a living. As she writes, [H]undreds of species live in human intestines, skin, lungs, muscle, brain, liver, blood, and everywhere else they can find a niche. They can do remarkable damage to every physiological system, leading to death, blindness, and behavioral changes. Drisdelle discusses amoebae, roundworms, tapeworms, mites, and others, often in too

much detail. She also examines the historical context in which some parasites have found their way to us and notes their effect on world events, such as the impact Plasmodium falciparum, a protozoa that causes malaria, had on the course of the Vietnam War. She notes that some scholars have even credited malaria with bringing down the Roman Empire.... On the positive side, she demonstrates that, in some cases, with enough political will, dramatic improvements in public health can be made. This is definitely not a book for the squeamish, and readers who lack a special interest in parasites will find it tedious. 29 b&w photos, 2 maps. (June) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Yuck! Gross! Who wants to read a book about creepy parasites? Who wants to think about the fact that we might play host to tapeworms, amoebas, or mites? In this natural and social history of the organisms that can infect humans, parasitologist and author Drisdelle has created an irresitably readable account of how parasites affect us and in turn affect human history. Her first example paves the way for the rest of the narrative: the biblical Jericho was a city founded at a desert oasis. Unfortunately, its reputation as a reliable watering place brought traders from many lands who inadvertently brought the worm that causes schistosomiasis. Generations of people tied to one water source sickened, their strength sapped by the parasite, until the Hebrews invaded, conquered the city with little resistance from its weakened inhabitants, and forbade settlement of the blighted area. For this and other examples, the author provides information about the life cycle of the parasite, about its means of infecting its human host, about the medical results of that infection, and finally about how history was changed with the arrival of the parasite. We learn of Stanley exploring Ã Â¿Â  darkest AfricaÃ Â¿Â  and bringing sleeping sickness in his wake, of how hookworm assisted the Union victory in the Civil War, of the spread of malaria along the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the Vietnam War, and of toxoplasmosis stopping Martina Navratilova from winning the U.S. Open. An infectious read (pun intended)! --Nancy Bent --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This book showcases the alien, gross, disturbing and utterly fascinating world of parasites for a mass audience. The chapters are organized around interesting aspects of multiple parasitic lifeforms and how certain situations can cause one or many of them to afffect the human world. This organization makes for some cool chapters, such as how parasites have been used in the detection of crime or in the infliction of torture, but makes it a bit hard to keep track of which parasites are related to others. This is a pretty minor critique of an otherwise fine piece of popular science writing

that will fascinate most readers while making them a little more self-conscious every time one scratches an itch. It is a quick read that picks up noticably about halfway through and becomes compulsive reading.

Schistosomiasis as the secret weapon in the battle of Jericho? The author begins Chapter 1 with a retelling of Hulse’s idea that a parasite was responsible for Joshua’s victory over the mighty city. Next she describes the famous trek of Henry Morton Stanley through the Congo and indicts him as an accomplice in the spread of sleeping sickness. Great stuff and we are only on page 19.From there,however, the book is an uneven read. Some accounts are shallow, discussing the natural history of the parasite in detail but skimming the human account. For example, the story showing the linkage of malaria to the capture of the millennium bomber is interesting but truncated. The "punishment of the boats", describing the tortuous death of Mithridates, on the other hand, paints an image that evokes a reaction from the reader.If you are interested in the intersection of the natural world and human history, this is a good book for you. If you teach the Biological sciences, I recommend that you have a copy of this and Parasite Rex on your shelf.

Irrelevant for learning purposes. More hypothetical lore

Pretty good and informative.

Other reviewers say Drisdelle’s book is "not for the squeamish." I agree with that if you agree that parents and aspiring parents do not fit in that category. I need not even tell other existing parents what I mean by that. For the aspiring parents I will say that parenting is a wonderful experience and a responsibility to take seriously, and yes there is some slight chance [snicker] that your child might eject a semi-liquid substance on you that out-squeams anything you’ve felt from viewing Hollywood special effects. Parents do not have the luxury of being squeamish, so "not for the squeamish" does not apply to you.Who should read this book: parents, people interested in science, the people who run your local water treatment plant (Chapter 3 esp.), adventurers/world travelers, Scout troop leaders and anyone else who might ever help introduce your kids to the magnificent wonders of the outdoors and camping. Life and nature should be enjoyed, but some of the stories in this book may help you and your loved ones avoid making a simple mistake that has significant, lifelong consequences. You’ll have to draw your own conclusions about what is or isn’t the appropriate level of caution, but the book will help you understand, for example, why it can be risky to drink clear

mountain water downstream from a beaver dam.Who else? Anyone who is unsure why certain foods must be cooked properly. Some people know that pork must be cooked, and other people avoid it altogether. Those simple steps have eliminated a great deal of dangerous health problems. However with a deeper insight into the parasites that can exist in infected, undercooked pork, you can understand why even those steps are only a part of the solution, and you'll appreciate the wisdom of hand-washing. Drisdelle weaves the history, the science, the medical, and the practical into engaging, educational chapters.For me, this book also has been a revelation about how much has been done to reduce and eliminate parasites that previously have had such a horrific impact on people who never knew how or why they had fallen prey. Clearly some bright people poured money, time, and monumental effort into eradicating C. hominivorax (which means "man eater.) Perhaps you feel as I do that we owe a debt to future generations to be as informed and as forward-thinking as those non-squeamish heroes who made our lives better. To paraphrase an old saying, those who forget the past victories over parasites are more likely to be plagued by them in the future.There is one part of the book that you may want to skip--the "punishment of the boats" (146-147.) Pretty gruesome.In closing I want to call attention to one more example that I liked: Drisdelle super-sized a fly to describe its companion organisms and the health hazards they pose to us. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade should include a Drisdelle fly float to remind us why food should always be protected from flies. Alas such a float will never come to pass; the audience for the parade includes the squeamish.

This book starts off at a cracking pace as it starts to explain how damaging parasites can be and how they have affected human history. The Biblical tale of the fall of Jericho, trumpets at all, is most likely to in fact be the story of how the population were so crippled by a waterborne parasite that it had no chance of resisting the invaders when they attacked. The author comes up with other intriguing examples -- how the U.S. explorer Stanley inadvertently opened up vast chunks of Africa to flies carrying sleeping sickness and how a tapeworm might have altered the personality of British explorer James Cook and led directly to his death. Unfortunately, we read precious little about how the slaves imported from Africa could have caused the Confederate side to lose the American Civil War. They were carrying worms which spread widely through slave-owning states and permanently weakened the local population, from which troops were drawn. From here we wander up and down nations and continents in a rather unfocused way, peering at incidents (most of them in Canada and the United States) where parasites laid people low in always disgusting ways. The main message is -- wash your hands after going to the bathroom. Always. This is not a book for the squeamish,

although the photos are in large point pretty useless. All in all, a good idea, and some great anecdotes, but it needs more work and more order imposed on the chapters.

I keep getting around to books well after they are published. I have read a number of books about life on man, so to speak, and this book is about the middle of the pack. It’s fascinating as far as it goes. The selected parasites covered in this book seem to be selected as representative types and also for agreeable grossness. The information is solid, but the writing could be better.One interesting detail is that not all parasites have been with us for the long term, Drisdelle describes amoebas in the eye from soft contact lens wash.

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