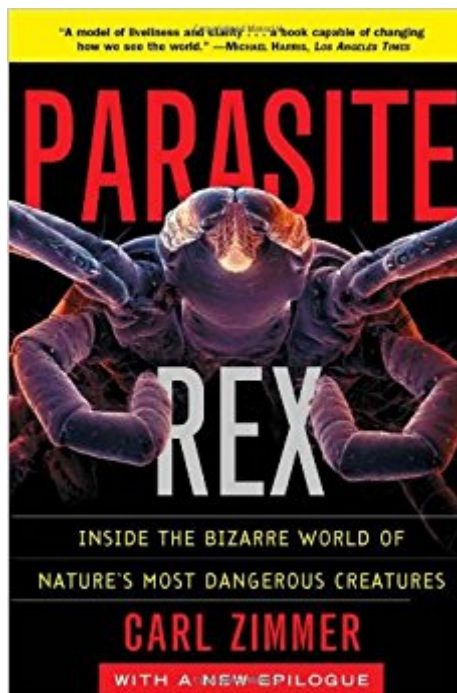




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Parasite Rex: Inside The Bizarre World Of Nature's Most Dangerous Creatures



Synopsis

> For centuries, parasites have lived in nightmares, horror stories, and the darkest shadows of science. In >, Carl Zimmer takes readers on a fantastic voyage into the secret universe of these extraordinary life-forms— which are not only among the most highly evolved on Earth, but make up the majority of life’s diversity. Traveling from the steamy jungles of Costa Rica to the parasite-riddled war zone of southern Sudan, Zimmer introduces an array of amazing creatures that invade their hosts, prey on them from within, and control their behavior. He also vividly describes parasites that can change DNA, rewire the brain, make men more distrustful and women more outgoing, and turn hosts into the living dead. This comprehensive, gracefully written book brings parasites out into the open and uncovers what they can teach us all about the most fundamental survival tactics in the universe—the laws of Parasite Rex.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Many books provoke a visceral reaction, but few really make you itch. Science writer Carl Zimmer’s Parasite Rex does just that, provoking a deliciously creepy sense of paranoia in the reader as it explores a long-misunderstood realm of science. While entomologists love to announce that there are more species of insects than all other animals combined, few parasitologists choose to trump that by reminding us that "parasites may outnumber free-living species four to one." That figure is based on the multicellular chauvinism of the 19th century, which excludes bacteria and fungi from consideration (athlete’s foot, anyone?), but Zimmer looks at the E. coli in our guts as well as the worms, flukes, mites, and other critters that earn a healthy living at our expense--and the expense of

our domesticated plants and animals. The author traveled to Africa to see firsthand the effects of sleeping sickness and river blindness. He learned from physicians and researchers that the parasites that wreak so much havoc are much more than the simple degenerates we've taken them for. Their complex adaptations to their environments--us--are as lovely and awe-inspiring as any eye or wing. The examples of hormonal and other behavioral control of hosts, causing changes in feeding habits and other life essentials, are chilling when personalized. Zimmer knows his subject well, and his writing, while robust and affecting, never descends to the all-too-easy gross-out. You wouldn't expect to find respect for a tapeworm, but *Parasite Rex* will show you how beautiful Earth's truly dominant life forms are. --Rob Lightner --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of the year's most fascinating works of popular science is also its most disgusting. From tapeworms to isopods to ichneumon wasps, "parasites are complex, highly adapted creatures that are at the heart of the story of life." Zimmer (*At the Water's Edge*) devotes his second book to the enormous variety of one- and many-celled organisms that live on and inside other animals and plants. The gruesome trypanosomes that cause sleeping sickness had nearly been routed from Sudan when the country's civil war began: now they're back. Costa Rican researcher Daniel Brooks has discovered dozens of parasites, including flies that lay eggs in deer noses: "snot bots." And those are only the creatures from the prologue. Zimmer discusses how the study of parasites began, with 19th-century discoveries about their odd life cycles. (Many take on several forms in several generations, so that a mother worm may resemble her granddaughter, but not her daughter.) He looks at how parasites pass from host to host, and how they defeat immune systems and vice versa. Many parasites alter their hosts' behavior: *Toxoplasma* makes infected rats fearless, thus more likely to be eaten by cats, who will then pick up the microbe. Quantifiable "laws of virulence" lead parasites to become nasty enough to spread, yet not so nasty as to wipe out all their hosts. And eons of coevolution can affect both partners: howler monkeys may avoid violent fights because screwworms can render the least scratch fatal. Two final chapters address parasites in human medicine and agriculture. Not only are parasites not all bad, Zimmer concludes in this exemplary work of popular science, but we may be parasites, too. And we have a lot to learn from them about how to manage earth, the host we share. Illus. (Sept.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is FABULOUS. Who knew the world of parasites could be so interesting. And the author's

skill at making it entertaining as hell is amazing. Clearly, a tremendously gifted writer. Never heard of him before this book, but I'll be checking out his other writings.

Though it sounds odd, this book gave me a profound respect for parasites and an understanding of just how difficult it can be to study them. Indeed, for some young adults, reading this book could be the career-deciding event in their young lives. So why just three stars? Two reasons. First, the lack of illustrations. Nature books -- especially of such strange creatures with their multi-stage life cycle -- cry out for photos and illustrations. So although the text was very good, with nothing but words to go by, the visual images that the reader unconsciously comes up with could be far off the mark. (I.e., Picture visiting a natural science museum that has signs but no exhibits.) Second, the book sometimes speculates about the influence that parasites may have had on evolution and animal behavior. Though such speculations make for interesting thought experiments, they are by their very nature unprovable.

Well written, engaging discussion of a very large class of creatures living only on/in others.

Parasites may be disgusting to many, some a dreadful danger to their host, beneficial helpers to others, FAR more abundant and far less well known and studied than most of us know. Not a book for the squeamish or willfully ignorant of biological reality. Beautifully informative for those keen to know the diversity of living things.

ahh.. ok

But I like this sort of science 'tell all'. Who knew there was so much to tell about parasites? Well written, if entertaining is the hallmark. It altered my perception of the world around me. First the details of one creature devouring another from within seems horrible. But then the importance of balance between host and parasite mollifies one's disgust ... But not entirely. We smugly think we are free of parasites in this day and age. But our escape is fleeting, and only enjoyed by a small percentage of humankind, and not at all by the rest of life forms on the planet. Ali

Very interesting! Parasitism is the most common relationship on earth! Why wouldn't you want to learn more? The book encompasses the evolutionary power of parasites. Though, our first instinct may be to rid the world of these creatures, the book highlights the importance of parasites within our ecosystems. We ourselves are parasites, and the earth, our host!

Very good book!!

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