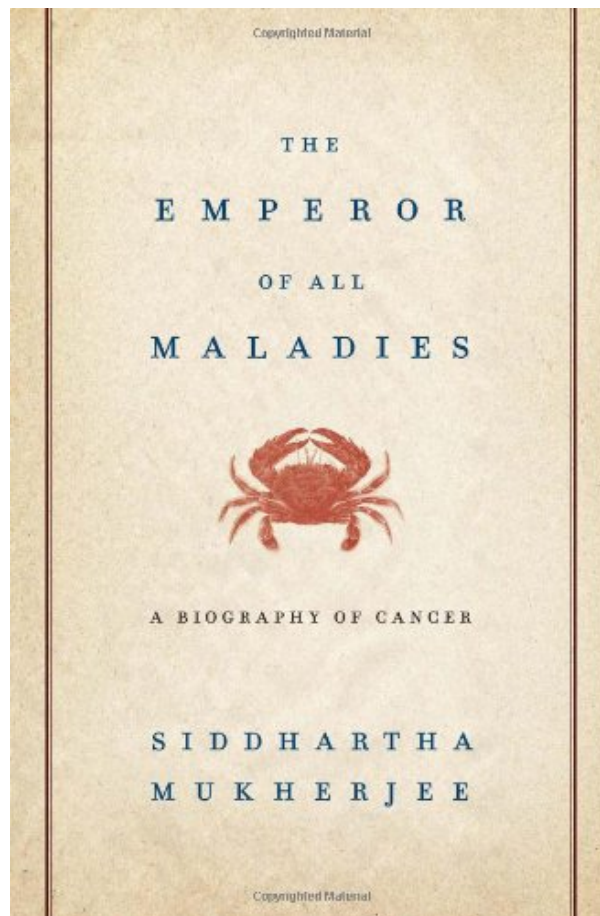


THE EMPEROR OF ALL MALADIES: A BIOGRAPHY OF CANCER BY SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE



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Amazon.com Review

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The Emperor of All Maladies is a magnificent, profoundly humane “biography” of cancer—from its first documented appearances thousands of years ago through the epic battles in the twentieth century to cure, control, and conquer it to a radical new understanding of its essence.

Physician, researcher, and award-winning science writer, Siddhartha Mukherjee examines cancer with a cellular biologist’s precision, a historian’s perspective, and a biographer’s passion. The result is an astonishingly lucid and eloquent chronicle of a disease humans have lived with—and perished from—for more than five thousand years.

The story of cancer is a story of human ingenuity, resilience, and perseverance, but also of hubris, paternalism, and misperception. Mukherjee recounts centuries of discoveries, setbacks, victories, and deaths, told through the eyes of his predecessors and peers, training their wits against an infinitely resourceful adversary that, just three decades ago, was thought to be easily vanquished in an all-out “war against cancer.”

The book reads like a literary thriller with cancer as the protagonist. From the Persian Queen Atossa, whose Greek slave cut off her malignant breast, to the nineteenth-century recipients of primitive radiation and chemotherapy to Mukherjee’s own leukemia patient, Carla, The Emperor of All Maladies is about the people who have soldiered through fiercely demanding regimens in order to survive—and to increase our understanding of this iconic disease.

Riveting, urgent, and surprising, The Emperor of All Maladies provides a fascinating glimpse into the future of cancer treatments. It is an illuminating book that provides hope and clarity to those seeking to demystify cancer.

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OFF THE CHARTS

By Kenneth E. MacWilliams

You remember the scene in the film "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid"? From the top of the bluff looking into the distance at dusk, Butch sees the lights of the pursuing posse which doesn't stop tracking them even at night and says "How many are following us? They're beginning to get on my nerves. Who are

those guys?" In the same threatening way cancers have been dogging human beings since the dawn of time, and although we now know quite a lot about cancer we still don't really know "who are those guys" or how to shake them. And they sure are "beginning to get on our nerves" as Butch said. Almost one out of four of us will eventually wrestle with cancer -- the defining illness of our generation -- and lose our lives in the process. Until it catches up with us most of us will try to ignore this fact, just as when we were very young children alone in our bedroom trying to go to sleep at night we tried to ignore the monster that we sometimes feared might be lurking in our bedroom closet.

Enter oncologist Siddhartha Mukherjee who almost parentally takes us by the hand to give us the courage to open with him the door to that dark and foreboding closet in order to see what is really lurking inside. Since eventually most of us are going to have to wrestle with this monster anyway -- either as a victim or as a loved one of a victim -- looking intelligently and closely into that dark closet does diminish fear and enhance wise perspective. And on this incredible journey into the depths of that darkness, what an absolutely marvelous guide is this modern day Virgil called Siddhartha Mukherjee as he leads us on this long and often harrowing journey through the swarth that cancer has cut through mankind throughout time.

Mukherjee is a veritable kaleidoscope. Turn his writing one way and you experience him as an exciting writer of page-turning detective stories or mystery stories; turn him another and he's a highly effective communicator of cellular biology; turn him a third and you get superb science writing; turn him a fourth and he has the grandeur and broad sweep of an excellent historian. It's hard to believe that this one book, combining all of these appealing characteristics, is the work of just one man. And underlying it all is his sterling medical training and credentials which have been enumerated often elsewhere.

The book itself is a tour de force. It is the first book of such extraordinary scope regarding cancer. Its architectural structure brings to mind Melville's *Moby Dick* and how effectively and artfully Melville braided together the three strands of his great classic: a grand adventure story, the technology of whaling, and a treatise of humanity and philosophy. Equally effectively does Mukherjee weave together all the various facets of this iconic disease throughout history, from describing cancer from the patient's perspective, to viewing the never ending battles of physicians and medical researchers with cancer over the centuries, to examining the mysteries of the cellular nature of cancer itself and what really goes on in there, to the pro and con impact of this never ending plague on the spirit of the individual human and on our race as a whole, to peering into a crystal ball for a glance of cancer's and our future together. While doing all of this the alchemy of Mukherjee's writing continually turns science into poetry and poetry into science.

Simply put, it is so good, and so incandescently clear and lucid, and so powerful, and so engrossing, and so easily consumed that you will not lay it down without someone or circumstances forcing you to.

Had I read this book in my teens I would have found my life's career. I can only imagine that while you are reading this book, somewhere there will be some very young teenage girl or boy who will also be reading it at the same time you are, and who will become totally hooked by this book just as you will be, and who will go on to make a career in cancer research, a career that might provide the breakthrough that humanity has been searching and hoping for all of these many centuries. Thus although you will never know it, you will have "been there" at the initial motivation of that person and thus indirectly present at the earliest genesis of the eventual great idea.

This book has THAT potential. It is THAT good.

Kenneth E. MacWilliams

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

read it after your treatment

By Aaron McLoughlin

Last April I was diagnosed with acute leukaemia. After a stem cell transplant I am coming up for a year.

When you are told you have cancer you are bewildered. You are also very angry. I asked myself was there something I had done in my past that was going to deprive me seeing my two sons grow up into happy young men and dads. The first two weeks go by in a weird nightmare. Day 17 your hair falls out. Your peeing orange from the chemo drugs, which have put me off lucozade for life. You double check all your insurances are up to date and update a well to make sure my wife does not have any hassles with the tax authorities. At the age of 44 you are very angry. You realise you are likely going to die. You are angry because you have no idea what is doing it. What you planned for when you were older is all meaningless. But, thanks to certain stubbornness and amazing treatment and care, and a generous gift of life from a German donor of life giving stem cells, I am alive.

This book helps explain many of the questions I had. It does it in a way that makes sense if you don't have a degree in science. What was until recently a death sentence is no longer the case. The battle against cancer was waged by intrepid individuals, and this book explains the war so far. It outlines the causes of cancer, whether it is a virus, bacteria, induced by smoking or chemicals, or just our own body playing up and turning on itself. It explains how our own understanding is still basic but advancing year by year, and treatments, if not cures, are being found for many, although not all cancers.

I learned that what was once a death sentence is not the case today. I am looking forward to see my sons become men. This book gave me clarity, it gave me hope.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

An insider's view of cancer

By Ionut Trestian

I only read this book because Ken Burns produced a documentary on it that is coming out in the Spring of 2015. I really love Ken Burns documentaries, hence the interest. Across the book, there is only one common character, cancer. Although cancer is not a single disease but a collection of several diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of cells in the body, the book portrays cancer as a great villain, lurking in the shadows, ready to strike at any time. What makes this story different and far from dry is the way S. Mukherjee tells it: "the story of leukemia - the story of cancer - isn't the story of doctors who struggle and survive, moving from one institution to another. It is the story of patients who struggle and survive, moving from one embankment of illness to another. Resilience, inventiveness, and survivorship — qualities often ascribed to great physicians — are reflected qualities, emanating first from those who struggle with illness and only then mirrored by those who treat them. If the history of medicine is told through the stories of doctors, it is because their contributions stand in place of the more substantive heroism of their patients."

Across the book, we are also introduced to ways of fighting or stalling the advance of cancer: radical surgery and radical mastectomy, X-rays, cytotoxics, monoclonal antibodies, tyrosine kinase inhibitors and S. Mukherjee explains really well how all of the above function (or don't function in some cases). One of the strengths of the book is that it gives a behind the scenes look at how certain drugs or procedures came to be (Druker's struggles with developing imatinib) or how other procedures were proven to be too radical and changed such as Halsted's radical mastectomy.

The fight to find a cure for cancer has triggered enormous social forces in the 20th century and in the book we are introduced to some of the main characters: Sidney Farber and the Jimmy Fund, Mary Lasker and the

American Cancer Society both determined to enact policy changes that will get more resources allocated to the war against cancer. These are just a few figures in this war, but there were other forces as well that fought for cigarette labeling for example, or more personal struggles related to compassionate drug use.

S. Mukherjee ends the book on a more positive note. All throughout the book we get the impression that primitive forces are battling a very complex disease, using disfiguring surgery or drugs that oftentimes end up causing cancer themselves. The final few chapters are not so gloomy, he takes a molecular biologist's view of the disease and explains our current understanding of the processes and pathways involved and you do get the impression that by 2050 we will be able to target the specific pathways and mutations that make up a particular form of cancer.

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