



The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer

By Siddhartha Mukherjee

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The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer By Siddhartha Mukherjee

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, and now a documentary from Ken Burns on PBS, *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 may have cut off her diseased 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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2010: "In 2010, about six hundred thousand Americans, and more than 7 million humans around the world, will die of cancer." With this sobering statistic, physician and researcher Siddhartha Mukherjee begins his comprehensive and eloquent "biography" of one of the most virulent diseases of our time. An exhaustive account of cancer's origins, *The Emperor of All Maladies* illustrates how modern treatments--multi-pronged chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, as well as preventative care--came into existence thanks to a century's worth of research, trials, and small, essential breakthroughs around the globe. While *The Emperor of All Maladies* is rich with the science and history behind the fight against cancer, it is also a meditation on illness, medical ethics, and the complex, intertwining lives of doctors and patients. Mukherjee's profound compassion--for cancer patients, their families, as well as the oncologists who, all too often, can offer little hope--makes this book a very human history of an elusive and complicated disease. --Lynette Mong

From Publishers Weekly

Mukherjee's magisterial history of cancer research is poorly served by Stephen Hoyer's impersonal, tone-deaf narration. Mukherjee is a practicing oncologist, and his is a deeply personal account, replete with stories of his own patients and practice, that begs for an intimate reading. But Hoyer is pedantic, dry, stentorian--everything that this book isn't--and his newscaster's delivery cannot convey the author's compassion for his patients or the suspense and thrill of scientific discovery that the book so brilliantly describes. A Scribner hardcover. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Apparently researching, treating, and teaching about cancer isn't enough of a challenge for Columbia University cancer specialist Mukherjee. He was also moved to write a biography of a disease whose name, for millennia, could not be uttered. The eminently readable result is a weighty tale of an enigma that has remained outside the grasp of both the people who endeavored to know it and those who would prefer never to have become acquainted with it. An unauthorized biography told through the voices of people who have lived, toiled, and, yes, died under cancer's inexorable watch. Mukherjee recounts cancer's first known literary reference--hence its birth, so to speak--in the teachings of the Egyptian physician Imhotep in the twenty-fifth century BCE, in which it is clear that Imhotep possessed no tools with which to treat what appears to be breast cancer. His cryptic note under "Therapy:" "There is none." Throughout cancer's subsequent years, many more physicians and scientists with names both familiar and obscure attempted and occasionally succeeded in deciphering or unlocking keys to many of the disease's mysteries. Alas, this is not a posthumous biography, but it is nonetheless a surprisingly accessible and encouraging narrative. --Donna Chavez

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Chad West:

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