

Not Your Average Microbe – A Review of SUPERBUG by Maryn McKenna

Description

Based on my background, as well as my thesis, many people assume that I am an animal guy through and through. Granted, my thesis was on frog salinity tolerance, and I know quote a bit about a vast majority of animals – but that is not my only area of interest.

I took a microbiology course in 4th year, due in large part to my mother saying I would enjoy it and having a passive interest in how the so-called “lower organisms” worked.

Man, was I wrong.

I learned to love microbiology and learning about bacteria and viruses – how they work, how they kill, how they fight and how they die. It all interested me, and I soaked up all that information like a sponge.

If there would have been more microbiology courses at my university, I would have taken them and perhaps changed my thesis into something microbial. I still love learning about bacteria and viruses, and will take any opportunity to expand my existing knowledge base.

That is why I was thrilled to get an advanced copy of Maryn McKenna’s new book [SUPERBUG](#), coming out on March 23, 2010, which deals with the development of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus).

MRSA is what is known as a superbug, it is multiple-drug resistant and impressively deadly. It takes massive amounts of drugs with often serious side-effects to even have a chance of beating it.



[MRSA – Courtesy of GiantMicrobes.com](#)

While it was historically known as a disease that only occurred in hospitals in people that were already suffering from a weakened immune system – that is no longer the case. A new completely different strain has come up that affects people who have not had any contact with hospitals. It is known as community-acquired MRSA, and is surprisingly lethal.

McKenna’s style is aptly suited to this type of book, as there is a lot of medical jargon that requires a deft hand to explain to people with little to no knowledge in that particular area. This is accomplished through what I can only describe as a massive amount of interviews and research with individuals who have been affected by MRSA.

This book raises a lot of issues regarding the sanitary procedures performed at hospitals, the over-prescription of antibiotics in both people and animals, and the sheer speed in which MRSA can adapt.

Reading this book may seem like some sort of scare tactic, and it is. But it is the sort of thing people NEED to hear.

And the best way to do this is to let the people whose lives have been affected speak for themselves, and McKenna realized this and only breaks away from a narrative for context. Simply put, it is a superbly written science book that reads like a novel.

I donâ€™t want to spoil any of the surprises lurking within the book, and there are many regarding the health care industry, misplaced government spending and agricultural practices that would shock you.

There are also parts of this book which may be difficult to read if you are squeamish, specifically where she describes the various symptoms that people infected with MRSA had to deal with. And, not all the people you meet throughout the book survive, as MRSA is an indiscriminate killer.

SUPERBUG is a very impressive book that has some very important lessons to teach us about microbial evolution, and the huge effect it can have on the human population.



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