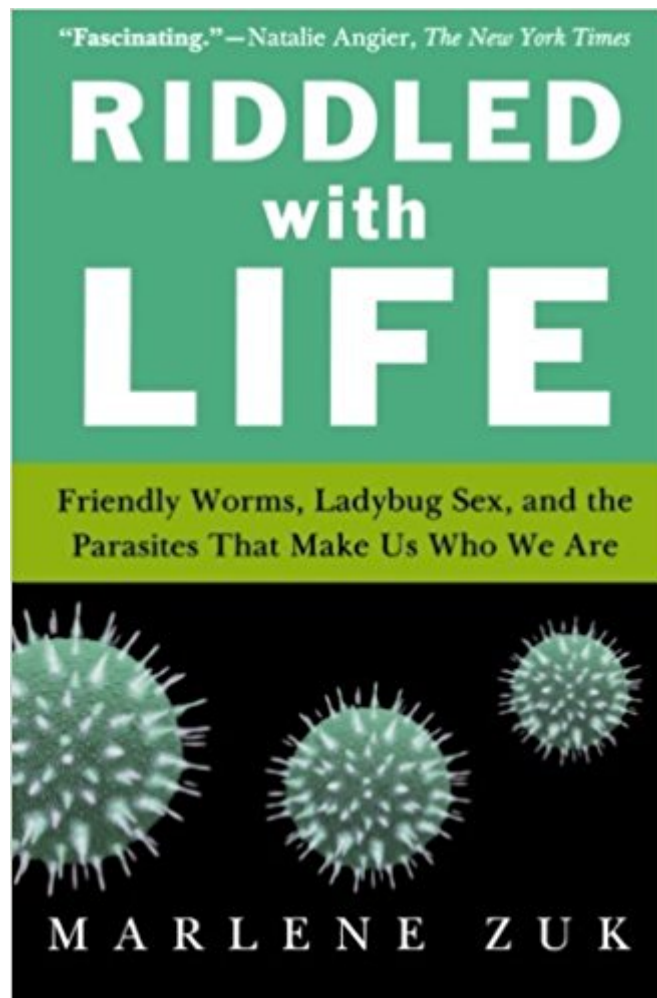




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Riddled With Life: Friendly Worms, Ladybug Sex, And The Parasites That Make Us Who We Are



Synopsis

We treat disease as our enemy. Germs and infections are things we battle. But what if we've been giving them a bum rap? From the earliest days of life on earth, disease has evolved alongside us. And its presence isn't just a natural but is also essential to our health. Drawing on the latest research, Zuk answers a fascinating range of questions about disease: Why do men die younger than women? Why are we attracted to our mates? Why does the average male bird not have a penis? Why do we--as well as insects, birds, pigs, cows, goats, and even plants--get STDs? Why do we have sex at all, rather than simply splitting off copies of ourselves like certain geckos? And how is our obsession with cleanliness making us sicker? In this witty, engaging book, evolutionary biologist Zuk makes us rethink our instincts as she argues that disease is our partner, not our foe. Reconsider the fearsome parasite!

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

PRAISE FOR RIDDLED WITH LIFE "Fascinating."--Natalie Angier, The New York Times
"What's eating you? Or to put it more politely, 'sharing your space,' which happens to be your body? The answers are oddly consoling in evolutionary biologist Marlene Zuk's witty 'disease appreciation' course . . . Beguiling."--O, The Oprah Magazine

Published in hardcover by Harcourt, 2007, 978-0-15-101225-1/0-15-101225-3

I bought this book for a college class about parasites, and it was super interesting. This book is written in a way that is really easy to read, and it will make you think about parasites in completely new ways. After reading this book, I feel like I have a much better understanding of the complexity of parasites and the multitude of ways they interact with and affect their hosts. This book also helped me understand why several things about humans are the way they are (and the reasons can be very surprising). Overall, this was a really fun and interesting read and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in parasites, human health/biology, etc.

Marlene Zuk's book about parasites is great. It's readable and informative. It has scientific depth without being too bogged down in mathematics or technicalities. Zuk studied with Bill Hamilton and his obsession with parasitism rubbed off on her. The book apparently starts out arguing that parasites are good for you - which is a rather dubious thesis, since parasites are bad for their hosts by definition. However, this theme is fairly quickly abandoned, and the book turns into a joyous romp through the world of parasites. I don't have much bad to say about this fine book - but I did feel that some topics were missing. One was cultural evolution. Any proper study of parasitism needs to include both the organic and cultural realms. Self-encrypting computer viruses just don't exist in the organic realm - and this is the tip of an iceberg of interesting differences. As an example, the book discusses the hypothesis that the obesity epidemic is caused by parasitic bacteria. However it is hard to evaluate this hypothesis without comparing it to the competing hypothesis that manipulation by memetically engineered parasitic advertising memes is responsible for the obesity epidemic. In both cases obesity can be expected to spread from one human to another - and result in a plague of obesity (as we observe). However these hypotheses involve different vectors - and it should be possible to tease them apart experimentally. However, step one is to have them both on hand. Marlene systematically fails to consider any hypotheses involving cultural evolution. Another thing I felt was missing was the future of parasites. For example, humans are trying to wipe out many parasites - and in a few cases they have actually succeeded. This epic battle between parasites, and science, technology, hospitals and medicine is interesting - but it gets little coverage in this book. Will we wipe out the bacteria that cause tooth decay? Will the HIV virus evolve to become similar to the similar viruses in chimpanzees? Issues like these don't get much coverage in this book. Probably my favourite bit of the book was the last chapter - about parasitic mind control. I've looked into this topic myself a little and Marlene's coverage was great - again, except for the total failure to mention cultural evolution. For humans the number one parasitic mind control agents are memetic - not genetic. Ignoring marketing, advertising, patriotism, propaganda and indoctrination in

favour of toxoplasmosis seems like a failure to prioritize to me. Also, memetic mind control agents are much more interesting to study - since they have direct access to the mind's software. Organic parasitic mind control typically works at the level of messing with neurotransmitter levels. Cultural parasitic mind control is a much more subtle and interesting subject. It was an opportunity missed.

Marlene Zuk has put together a fascinating and helpful book about our relationships with the biology that exists in our environment and how it can help us or hurt us. As a physician, I appreciate the detailed approach to the subject that some people may be shocked by. The relationship between our immune system and the biologic organisms in our environment is a fascinating and very timely subject. It is important to adapt to our environment including bacteria, bugs, and dirt. Our immune system needs to develop in a context of real life. Fortunately we can do that without catching too many diseases. One should not eat dirt ("Pica"), but some lightly cleaned fresh vegetables and some lactobacillous could be helpful. These suggestions are in-tune with part of this book. There are also excellent discussions about emerging threats in our environment, that are up-to-date, and important for us all. A great book!

who knew scientist had a sense of humor!

Riddled with Life is the second book I have read by Marlene Zuk, after The Sex Lives of Insects got me interested in her readable and entertaining writing style. I have ordered her first book Sexual Selections, but have not received it yet. Riddled with Life tells the story of how parasites and various diseases are responsible for our evolution into who we are today. She tells the story so the average non-scientific reader can understand and enjoy it. If you like evolution and biology, I think you'll enjoy this book.

Great read!! I grew up in tropical regions of Latin America where parasites were always considered an enemy to be avoided. It wasn't until I read this book that I realized that not only could I NOT avoid them but in fact I NEEDED them for my very existence! This book is suitably researched and scientific to satisfy any skeptic. It is WONDERFULLY humorous throughout. It is informative as can be. Any layman, even without scientific training, will find this book highly informative, fun, and well worth the read. OK, there are a few passages that bog down a bit, but they are few and far between. The rest is just great. I'm giving this one to several people this Christmas.

I thoroughly recommend this book. It's packed with interest and is a great read. Highly readable and doesn't run out of steam all the way through. Interesting and thought provoking with insights into the causes of diseases that appear to be genetic. I have bought copies for my son and friends. I promise you, you won't be disappointed.

Required reading for an evolutionary genetics course. Really fascinating, but it was my major.

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