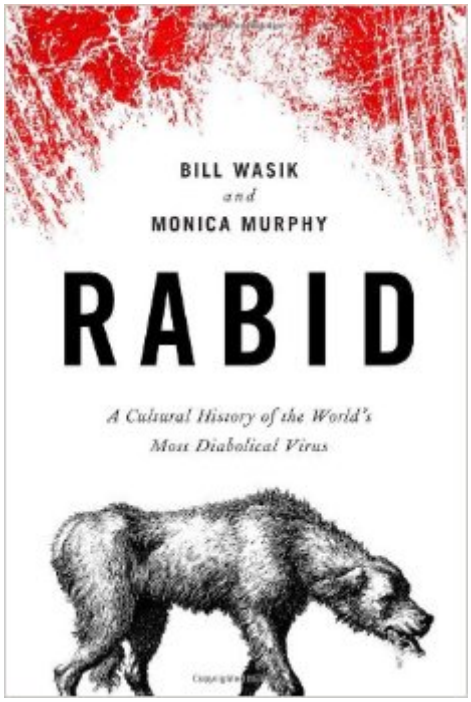
# Rabid: A Cultural History Of The World's Most Diabolical Virus



## Synopsis

A maddened creature, frothing at the mouth, lunges at an innocent victimâ ”and, with a bite, transforms its prey into another raving monster. Itâ ™s a scenario that underlies our darkest tales of supernatural horror, but its power derives from a very real virus, a deadly scourge known to mankind from our earliest days. In this fascinating exploration, journalist Bill Wasik and veterinarian Monica Murphy chart four thousand years in the history, science, and cultural mythology of rabies.The most fatal virus known to science, rabies kills nearly 100 percent of its victims once the infection takes root in the brain. A disease that spreads avidly from animals to humans, rabies has served throughout history as a symbol of savage madness, of inhuman possession. And today, its history can help shed light on the wave of emerging diseases, from AIDS to SARS to avian flu, that we now know to originate in animal populations.Â From Greek myths to zombie flicks, from the laboratory heroics of Louis Pasteur to the contemporary search for a lifesaving treatment, Rabid is a fresh, fascinating, and often wildly entertaining look at one of mankindâ ™s oldest and most fearsome foes.Â

## Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages
Publisher: Viking; 1 edition (July 19, 2012)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0670023736
ISBN-13: 978-0670023738
Product Dimensions: 8.6 x 5.8 x 1 inches
Shipping Weight: 14.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (163 customer reviews)
Best Sellers Rank: #367,644 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #158 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Infectious Diseases #177 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Special Topics > History #238 inÂ Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Pathology > Diseases > Viral

## Customer Reviews

It is unfortunate that Rabid’s best chapters fall at the end of the book. I loved reading about Louis Pasteur’s experiments and the rabies outbreak in Bali. The author, Bill Wasik, finally has real personalities to work with, real scientific challenges to chronicle, real stories to tell. After slogging through the first two-thirds of Rabid I perked up and found myself thinking, "Well, most of this book

was a chore to read but this...this!...would make a great magazine article."And if that sounds like damning by faint praise, well...it's meant to. Rabid is not one of those books whose defined, narrow subject cuts an exciting trail through the vastness of history. It tries to be. It traces the emergence of rabies from ancient Egypt to the present, it grapples with the cultural history of animal domestication, the interplay between cultural prejudice and scientific discovery, the forward march of science and the sheer power of fear.It would be awesome, except that it isn't. Huge chunks of the book are very academic, dense, factual prose. Which is interesting if the author has some revolutionary argument to make. Some brilliant idea to frame and polish. Wasik is just cataloguing what seems to be every single historical mention of rabies ever. I felt like I was reading an earnest undergraduate paper and I pitied all of my former professors.The closer that Wasik gets to the present the more interesting his material. He's got chops enough to make the story of rabies in the modern world pretty fascinating - everything from Louis Pasteur to the present is great. All of a sudden he's writing narrative non-fiction of the kind I like most, where there's a story and characters, challenges to overcome, anecdotes to relate.There's some good stuff in here, but I'd only recommend the book to people who are either (a) deeply, deeply interested in rabies or (b) really guiltless about skimming the boring bits.

Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy have explored the disease in "Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus.""Diabolic," defined as a characteristic of the devil, is a good word to use. The almost always-fatal (if untreated) virus renders its victims 'hydrophobic' - terrified of water. As the victims mind devolves into a virus-ravaged insanity, whatever personality once held by the person or animal disappears, replaced by a no-doubt devilish incoherence and rage.Every 'zombie' movie basically has rabies as the model - an untreatable disease where killing the victim even before the disease's onset is considered the humane course of action. The authors use examples of Will Smith's "I Am Legend," where his character kills his dog, his only friend, as soon as a rabies-like condition presents itself, and "Old Yeller," the frontier tragedy, which saw the title character unfairly suffer the same fate."Rabies" is written as a cultural history, much more than a medical journal or report. It's mostly third-person, until the end. The authors do dwell on various treatment options - and a chapter is given to Louis Pastuer's discovery of the rabies vacciene. But their primary goal is showing how this disease has factored into various cultural fears for hundreds of years.Even without much true scientific knowledge, the doctors of the Middle Ages and before could still see the link between a 'mad' dog's bite, and the similar, fatal condition that the victim might then suffer. The terror of such a ghastly disease - with such an obvious and common cause -

would clearly have made it far more horrible than an equally fatal flu or cancer, where no such link existed.The authors look into recent British fears about the English Channel Tunnel connecting England and France, and how this new landline might open the island of England to a rabies epidemic.Which did recently occur in the island of Bali, the authors relate, where an inefficient and poorly executed dog-'culling' program was the response to an epidemic created when one rabid dog arrived on the island. Dozens of Bali, Indonesia citizens died of the disease despite the treatment options - in an island with no recorded rabies cases, nobody believed it could happen.While at first I wasn't interested in a lengthy chapter that dealt with human's longstanding relationship with dogs, I soon realized that our love and sometimes mistreatment of our dogs comes from our own societal roots. We know that a good dog is loyal and friendly to a fault, but behind the playful eyes is our subconcious knowledge they sometimes carry this humanity-stripping disease.Just as dogs have been hardwired with a domestic influence over thousands of years, it's fair to say that our cultural reliance on rabies-based horror choices came from generations of this back-of-the-mind fear of an animal we take for granted - until their bite drives us insane.It is not a "fun" book, but it is exciting and horrifiying, and that does make it compelling and interesting.This review is based on a complimentary advance review copy.

I enjoyed the book but at times my frustration waxed as the author devoted an inordinate amount of space on the connections (or possible connections) between the disease caused by the rabies virus and the classic subjects of horror stories and films: vampires, werewolves and zombies. There were times when I came close to doing the unthinkable when I buy a book for leisure reading (as opposed to reference etc)- skip sections. At best 5 or 6 pages could have been devoted to the tangential connection between the rabies in popular culture and these denizens of horror literature. I just grew really tired of reading about zombies when I bought a book to read about rabies. The book is also very light on the fascinating biology of the virus itself and how it enters neurons, replicates and propagates. It seems kind of ridiculous that there can be tens of pages on zombies and vampires and essentially nothing on the molecular machinery of the virus and its transmission through an infected organism. I realize that this isn't a book on rabies virology but it is a subject which I expected to be covered in detail rather than in passing.

the Origins of the Ebola Virus NERDS: Book Four: The Villain Virus The Virus Invaders (Venture--Health & the Human Body) Virus dynamics: Mathematical principles of immunology and virology Virus: An Illustrated Guide to 101 Incredible Microbes Cultural Traditions in Iran (Cultural Traditions in My World) Cultural Traditions in Mexico (Cultural Traditions in My World) The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology) Cataloging Cultural Objects: A Guide to Describing Cultural Works and Their Images Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends (Cultural Exegesis) Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Cultural Liturgies) The Mapmakers' World: A Cultural History of the European World Map Robert Young Pelton's The World's Most Dangerous Places: 5th Edition (Robert Young Pelton the World's Most Dangerous Places) Che Guevara's Face: How a Cuban Photographer's Image Became a Cultural Icon (Captured World History) The Official SAT Subject Tests in U.S. & World History Study Guide (Official Sat Subject Tests in U.S. History and World History)