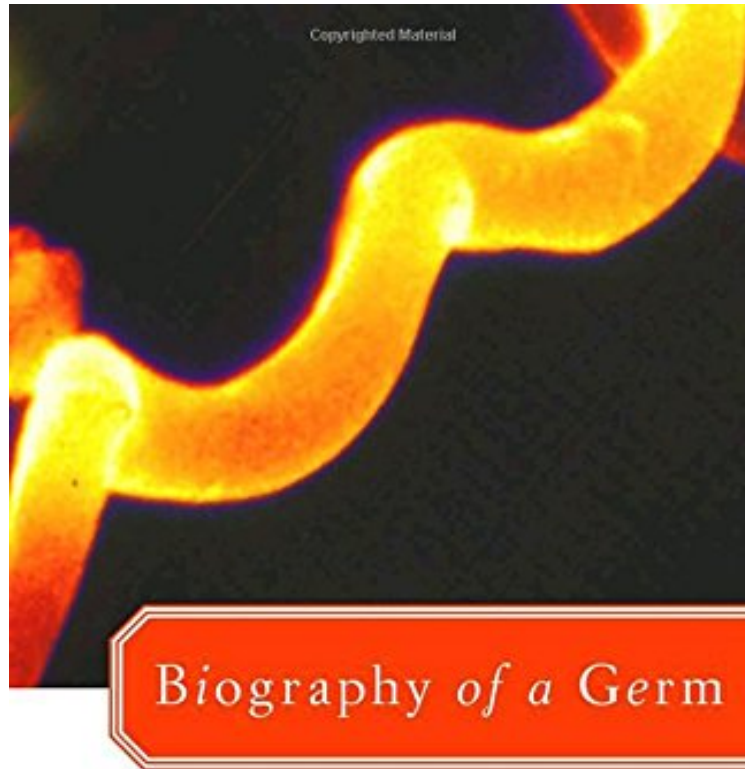


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Biography of a Germ

Arno Karlen

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Arno Karlen : Biography of a Germ before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Biography of a Germ:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Required reading for high school students By Bernard K Required reading for high school students (9th, 10th grade). It adds a new dimension to their biology textbooks. It glues together many concepts learned over the years including prokaryotes, eukaryotes, organelles, cell membrane constitution, electronic microscope, Linnaeus tree, Gaia, etc it is a short book and a great antidote for boring textbooks. 0 of 0

people found the following review helpful. Couldn't Put it Down By Beth Folkes I read this book a few months ago for a book report I had to do in my Entomology class. I choose it at first just because it was the shortest in length out of the other book options, but when I actually got it in the mail and started reading it I loved it! I read it all in one day. Now I am not a science person by any means, I usually hate any subject science related, but this book is nothing like reading a textbook at all. The author does such a good job about making it very informative but yet simple. I never thought I would have liked reading about a germ as much as I did! I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who loves science, and even to those of you like me who don't. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Witty and engaging By Piro It is amazing how a talented writer can take a patently boring topic and turn it into an arresting read. Arno Karlen uses historical anecdotes to transform his chronicle of the *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the germ that causes Lyme's disease, into an interesting read.

Arno Karlen, author of *Man and Microbes*, focuses on a single bacterium in *Biography of a Germ*, giving us an intimate view of a life that has been shaped by and is in turn transforming our own. *Borrelia burgdorferi* is the germ that causes Lyme disease. In existence for some hundred million years, it was discovered only recently. Exploring its evolution, its daily existence, and its journey from ticks to mice to deer to humans, Karlen lucidly examines the life and world of this recently prominent germ. He also describes how it attacks the human body, and how by changing the environment, people are now much more likely to come into contact with it. Charming and thorough and smart, this book is a wonderfully written biography of your not so typical biographical subject.

.com The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein might say that if a microbe could talk, we couldn't understand it, but psychoanalyst and science writer Arno Karlen has done his best to listen and translate in *Biography of a Germ*. This lovely, funny, even endearing portrait of *Borrelia burgdorferi* (or Bb), the screwy bacterium that causes Lyme disease, would charm even a terminal mysophobe like Howard Hughes. Unfortunately, Karlen has to justify his topic at greater length than do most biographers, but his reasoning is nearly lyrical in its enthusiasm for the microscopic. Following the genealogy of the germ back to our common ancestor (gulp) and beyond, the author finds a freshness in what we too often see as dry taxonomy and genetics. From there, he watches Bb as it makes its way through the circulation superhighways of deer, ticks, and hikers, each a stop on its complex life cycle. We elbowed our way into Bb's story comparatively recently, ironically hurting ourselves as we renewed our appreciation of and commitment to wilderness areas. As we destroyed, then created habitat for deer, we ended up inviting Bb to run amok in our bodies. Karlen captures the beauty and terror of this bizarre chain of events, providing new insights into our relationship with our environment. Much like its cousins that live harmlessly in our bloodstream, eyelashes, and guts, this tickborne germ will eventually evolve a truce with us to protect its reproduction. Unfortunately for current and future sufferers of Lyme disease, we're quite a few generations away from that happy time. While we're waiting, we can read *Biography of a Germ* to learn more about our new tenants and why we should care about them. --Rob Lightner From Publishers Weekly The germ is *Borrelia burgdorferi*, Bb for short, and causes Lyme disease in the people it infects: before it hits a human, Bb has to reside in three other animals: a mouse, a tick and a deer, in that order. This odd property, and the germ's wide distribution, means that Bb has been affected by changes in human land use: factories, clear-cuts, the growth of the suburbs and the environmental movement all had to happen for Lyme to become something Americans think about. And think about it we do: Bb is now so interesting that in 1997 scientists mapped its genome. All these facets make Bb the ideal candidate for what Karlen (*Man and Microbes*, etc.) claims is the first history of a pathogen written from that pathogen's perspective. Fascinating in their own right, Bb and its relatives also demonstrate larger patterns and questions in the study and history of microbes and molecular biology, of zoology and ecology, of medicine, public health policy and disease. In 22 brief chapters, Karlen lays out and answers some of those questions. He tells of Bb's sibling spirochetes, which cause syphilis and tropical diseases. He explains how ticks' adaptations let them parasitize "a chipmunk or a human," "a wren or a raccoon," and how Bb's adaptations let it jump between ticks and their hosts. Karlen has created a vigorous, compact account of Bb's life and times. And beyond the zoology and disease control, Karlen even offers a message: "Pathogens... are just trying to survive, and sometimes they must do so at other creatures' expense." The same could be said of humans." (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal The story of *Borrelia burgdorferi* (Bb), the microorganism that causes Lyme disease, should interest a wide audience, especially in North America, where much of the narrative unfolds. Psychoanalyst Karlen has a predilection for the social history of disease (his other books include *Napoleon's Glands and Other Ventures in Biohistory*; *Man and Microbes: Disease and Plagues in History and Modern Times*). Here, the author traces the social and environmental changes that might have caused the spread of Lyme disease. The early chapters are particularly well done, especially "Apologia pro vita sua," a spirited defense of the microbial world. As it is written for the general reader, the text would have benefited from additional illustrations to reinforce complicated details, such as Bb's life cycle, in the minds of readers. Suitable for all public libraries. DLeila Fernandez, Steacie Science Lib., York Univ., Toronto Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.