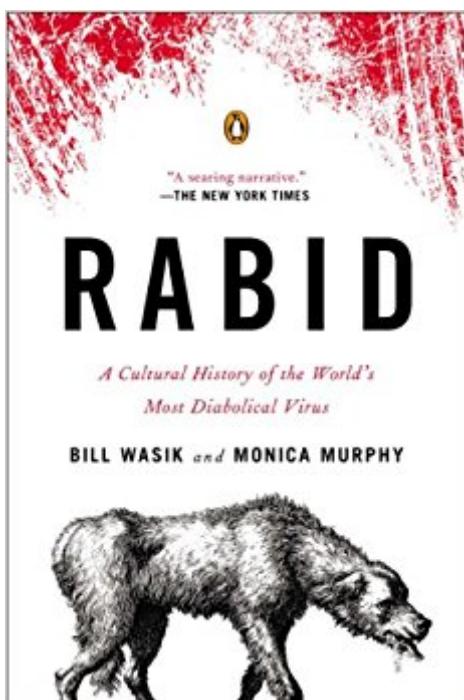


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# Rabid: A Cultural History Of The World's Most Diabolical Virus



## Synopsis

The most fatal virus known to science, rabies-a disease that spreads avidly from animals to humans-kills nearly one hundred percent of its victims once the infection takes root in the brain. In this critically acclaimed exploration, journalist Bill Wasik and veterinarian Monica Murphy chart four thousand years of the history, science, and cultural mythology of rabies. 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 and often wildly entertaining look at one of humankind's oldest and most fearsome foes. "A searing narrative." -The New York Times "In this keen and exceptionally well-written book, rife with surprises, narrative suspense and a steady flow of expansive insights, 'the world's most diabolical virus' conquers the unsuspecting reader's imaginative nervous system. . . . A smart, unsettling, and strangely stirring piece of work." -San Francisco Chronicle "Fascinating. . . . Wasik and Murphy chronicle more than two millennia of myths and discoveries about rabies and the animals that transmit it, including dogs, bats and raccoons."

-The Wall Street Journal

## Book Information

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Ã¢ "A searing narrative.Ã¢ "The New York TimesÃ¢ "In this keen and exceptionally well-written book, rife with surprises, narrative suspense and a steady flow of expansive insights, Ã¢ "the worldÃ¢ "s most diabolical virusÃ¢ " conquers the unsuspecting readerÃ¢ "s imaginative nervous system. . . . A smart, unsettling, and strangely

stirring piece of work. *Rabid* is a San Francisco Chronicle "Fascinating. . . . Wasik and Murphy chronicle more than two millennia of myths and discoveries about rabies and the animals that transmit it, including dogs, bats and raccoons. *Rabid* delivers the drama of Louis Pasteur's courageous work developing the rabies vaccine at the same time it details the disease's place in our cultural history, taking us from Homer to the Bronte sisters to Zora Neale Hurston to Richard Matheson. . . . All along the book's prose and pace shine—the book is as fast as the virus is slow. *Rabid* is a very readable, fascinating account of a terrifying disease. Wasik and Murphy grippingly trace the cultural history of the disease. . . . *Rabid* reminds us that the disease is a chilling, persistent reminder of our own animal connections, and of the simple fact that humans don't call all of the shots. *Rabid* is a compelling. . . . Murphy and Wasik give life, context and understanding to the terrifying disease. Like the virus itself, this fascinating book moves quickly, exploring both the marginalized status and deadly nature of the virus. And as the authors trace the influence of rabies through history, *Rabid* becomes nearly impossible to put down. *Rabid* is a New Scientist "An elegant exploration of the science behind one of the most horrible ways to die. *Rabid* is not for the squeamish. Yet those who are fascinated by how viruses attack the body, by the history of vaccination and by physicians' efforts to save the most desperately ill patients will want to read it. There is also a happy ending: scientists are working to harness rabies as a potent drug delivery vehicle. *Rabid* is a Scientific American "[Wasik and Murphy] offer an in-depth look at a disease so insidious that it even turns our best friends against us. The pair convincingly link the history of rabies with the history of man's fear of nature and the unknown, and our own latent capacity for beastliness. *Rabid* is a Daily Beast "Thrilling, smart, and devilishly entertaining, *Rabid* is one of those books that changes your sense of history—and reminds us how much our human story has been shaped by the viruses that live among us. *Rabid* is a Steven Johnson, author of *The Ghost Map* "Rabies has always been as much metaphor as disease, making it an excellent subject for cultural history. . . . As Wasik and Murphy document . . . the horror of rabies has been with us since the beginning of human civilization. *Rabid* is a Bookforum "Funny and spry. . . . It's a rare pleasure to read a nonfiction book by authors who research like academics but write like journalists. *Rabid* is a Alice Gregory, n+1 "Readable, fascinating, informative,

and occasionally gruesome, this is highly recommended for anyone interested in medical history or the cultural history of disease. • Library Journal (starred review) “Take Bill Wasik, one of our most perceptive journalistic storytellers, have him join forces with Monica Murphy, scholar of public health, and you end up with this erudite, true-life creep show of a book. It turns out that the rabies virus is a good bit more fascinating and at least as frightening as any of those blood-thirsty monsters that have stalked our fairy tales, multiplexes, and dreams. • Donovan Hohn, author of *Moby Duck* “Ambitious and smart. • Publisher’s Weekly “Terrible virus, fascinating history in *Rabid*. • NPR “As entertaining as they are on rabies in culture, the authors also eruditely report on medicine and public health issues through history, from ancient Assyria to Bali to Manhattan in the last five years, showing that while the disease may be contained, it may never be fully conquered. Surprisingly fun reading about a fascinating malady. • Kirkus Reviews “The ultimate weird dad book. • Very Short List “The rabies virus is a microscopic particle of genes and proteins. And yet it has cast a fearful shadow over all of human history. Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy have produced an eerily elegant meditation on disease and madness, dogs and vampires. It’s as infectious as its subject. • Carl Zimmer, NPR contributor and author of *Parasite Rex* “A fun read, rivaling a Stephen King novel for page-turning thrills. • The Awl

Bill Wasik is a senior editor at *Wired* and was formerly a senior editor at Harper’s. Monica Murphy, Wasik’s wife, is a veterinarian. They live in Oakland, California.

This disease has always been on my list of illnesses I did not want to get. I found this book and hoped it would cover the young lady with full blown rabies who was saved, making her a very rare survivor of this terrible disease. Throughout history this disease has had a mortality rate of 100% unless the timely use of the Pasteur vaccine intervened. This patient who survived without timely vaccine intervention was fortunate in that her physician aggressively pulled out all stops to save her. The rabies virus is known to travel from the site of the bite through peripheral nerves to the spinal cord and the brain, subsequently to the salivary glands. The young lady who survived was placed in a coma and support of her cardiovascular activity and breathing initiated. The book also tells about patients who received the Pasteur treatment before becoming ill and were saved. I found this book to be fascinating, enlightening and very readable. It covers more than the above mentioned cases, and

I found it hard to put down.

It's a rambling and very general book that draws (and quotes) from many other historical references without going into detail on anything. I had bought the book expecting it to have Galen's famous story about his rabid patient from bit to demise, but only a mention appears. In finishing the book, I realized I didn't know anymore about the disease than when I started.

The premise of this book is interesting - that of the "World's Most Diabolical Virus." The execution fails in some regards. While establishing a great hook for an introduction, the book dribbles into old historical accounts of dog domestication and examples of rabies in early writings. This may appeal to armchair anthropologist, but was a bit dry and long-winded in my opinion. From there the medical history of rabies is discovered for roughly the last half. This accounting and that of the development for the rabies vaccine were the highlight of the book. The book suffered from some repetitiveness, especially in the anthropological interludes, and occasional discontinuity of thought that didn't seriously hinder the flow of the book. I'm glad I read it, and will likely loan it to a friend, but I will likely never read it again. My advice to anyone who gets the book is to skip over sections that are tedious to read and get to the interesting parts of the book. It will likely not hurt your comprehension of the book.

Someone on the Wasik/Murphy team had a classical education and doesn't hesitate to use it. The deft interpretations of Ovid in particular are among the best passages in the book. But this self-styled cultural history is no work of scholarship, literary or otherwise. It's a well-arranged but conceptually undisciplined ramble through the authors' thinking and research. "Rabid: what I've learned so far" would be a more fitting title. The western part of the ancient world is clearly familiar ground for Wasik/Murphy; their scattered forays into eastern cultural history are superficial and haphazard by comparison. The various lexical permutations of Homeric rage get a few high-profile paragraphs, but when Wasik and Murphy turn their attention to the vast Chinese tradition, all we get is a half-hearted mention of two treatment methods recommended during the Jin dynasty. No analysis of rage as it appears in the Chinese lexicon! Which is certainly a missed opportunity, as anyone who has ever listened to a dissertation proposal on that very subject (yup) will readily acknowledge. But problem is that the western bias makes the whole study seem unreliable. Another kind of bias weakens the latter half of the book, as Wasik and Murphy seem determined to present rabies specialist and vehement critic of the Milwaukee Protocol Alan Jackson in as unflattering a light as possible.

Whatever one's views on the legitimacy of drug-induced coma for the treatment of human rabies, Dr. Jackson's objections deserve better representation. In spite of these faults, the book manages to be engaging and informative throughout. The final chapter is particularly interesting. Wasik and Murphy are not Bill Bryson or John McPhee, but they don't need to be. They have a story to tell, and they do it with care and enthusiasm. I would recommend this book for anyone with a relatively uninformed interest in zoonosis and/or the history of immunology. Specialists in either anthropology or medical history should skip it. Anyone who has benefited from the post-exposure vaccine invented by Louis Pasteur (yup) will surely join me in welcoming a chance to hear the story of its development told in full. A few comparisons: it's not nearly as informative as "The Hot Zone" but far better written than "Spillover" and far more engaging than "AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame."

An excellent history of one of the most horrifying diseases known to man, complete with folk tales and eyewitness accounts. It also gets into the biology of rabies. Frankly, this book is terrifying, but it's a great read!!

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