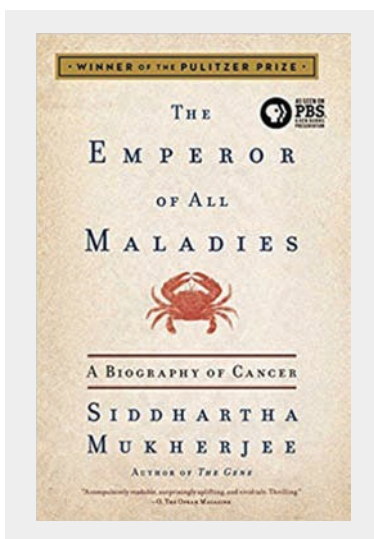


# Book Review: *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*

**Carolyn deCourt**

*The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer.* Siddhartha Mukherjee. New York: Scribner, 2010. 592 pages. ISBN 978-1439181713.



Cancer is an expansionist disease; it invades through tissues, sets up colonies in hostile landscapes, seeking “sanctuary” in one organ and then immigrating to another. It lives desperately, inventively, fiercely, territorially, cannily, and defensively—at times, as if teaching us how to survive. To confront cancer is to encounter a parallel species, one perhaps more adapted to survival than even we are.

—Siddhartha Mukherjee

This book is a chilling read and brings cancer into a light most of us don't want to think about. The phrase “out of sight, out of mind” is quickly dismissed after reading this book, as it goes into detail regarding one of the deadliest

diseases known to mankind. As someone without a heavily scientific or medical background, I found this book a lot to take in and comprehend but well worth it in the end. I had to read several sections multiple times to digest fully, and it was one of the most difficult books for me to sit down and read.

Many words come to mind after reading this book, including *long*, *detailed*, *intense*, *thought provoking*, *upsetting*, and *informative*. The word that I think is most accurate, though, is *informative*. Siddhartha Mukherjee filled the pages of this book with all of his cancer knowledge and many of his experiences. To read this book is to gain a better understanding of cancer and to see how far medicine has come.

The start of the book pulls you in with a story of a mother who learns she has cancer, and it vividly shows the emotions that accompany such a discovery. From this first story, Mukherjee dives into the history of cancer, discussing and detailing all of the old theories and procedures, many of which would be considered horrifying if practiced today. He reveals that cancer has been around much longer than we knew, providing examples of exhumed corpses from ancient Egypt that showed signs of cancer. Once mankind realized cancer was fast moving and could take over the body, the historical treatments were zealous and intense, with the goal of removing as much of the affected body parts as possible.

*The Emperor of All Maladies* captures the interest of the reader and has proven to be a book I will always remember—it sticks with you even after you finish it. Siddhartha Mukherjee refers to the battle with this disease as “the war on cancer,” and given the yearly increases in cancer diagnoses in our society, this is something most of us can agree with or relate to in some way. Science and medicine have come a long way in the past few decades, and new treatments continue to be discovered and tested. This war is far from over, and with the knowledge from this history, we should feel more equipped to face it head on.

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