

MICROBIAL MYSTERIES

A Story Collection

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Bats and bearded dragons, raccoons and baby goats—animals are our fellow Earth creatures. But they pose a threat. Each species harbors invisible microbes, ready to leap into human bodies. In this compilation of ten short medical thrillers and one graphic poem, public health disease detectives are challenged by mysterious outbreaks from zoonotic viruses, bacteria, and parasites.

Partial story list (story timeline)

- El Chinche (1993): Psychedelic insects on Mexican border (award—Arizona Mystery Writers).
- Firenze (2019): A hard-driving immigrant juggles his Tucson restaurant and his bearded dragon.
- MERS (2013): London and Saudi Arabia for coronavirus in camels and spillover to humans.
- Pérdida (2014-2019): In this reverse narrative story, a young mother in New York City struggles with the mysterious hospitalization of her five-year-old daughter.
- Bandit (2018-2019): Class differences in Washington, DC influence the outcome of infection with a dangerous neurologic parasite.
- Eruption (2019): A teenager visits a New Mexico hot spring with catastrophic results.
- Road Not Taken (2020): In an alternative history story, a mother attempts to find Christmas Eve joy during a Vermont ice storm and the COVID pandemic.

Book Club Discussion Questions

Schedule with the author at drmayamaguire@gmail.com

1. The genre elements include mystery, women's fiction, and romantic suspense. How do each of these elements contribute to the overall arc and your enjoyment of the stories?
2. What do short stories offer compared to full-length novels?
3. Is your reading enriched by the different points-of-view and style of each story?
4. What are some biological, regional, cultural, and religious influences on our perceptions of 'the other'?
5. How do geography and history influence these stories?
6. How do these stories about disease microbes from animals, many taking place prior to the COVID pandemic, foreshadow societal, medical, and public health challenges beginning in 2020?
7. Does the appearance of characters from the novels in these short stories benefit your understanding of the MayaVerse and the characters' relationships with Maya Maguire in the novels?
8. Zoonotic diseases are those in common between humans and non-human animals. How are transmission, investigation, prevention, and control more complex for zoonotic diseases than those infecting only humans?
9. How can someone with a veterinary medical degree contribute to disease investigations?
10. For authenticity, writers often rely on personal experience, while protecting privacy of those sharing life events with the author. Writers also use research and close consultation with others to create characters, plot events, and settings not their own. As a reader, do you have a preferred balance of work informed by an author's imagination, research, and representation of their background?

This book is intended for an adult audience, and may contain language, characters, themes, and content that are offensive or triggering to some readers.

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