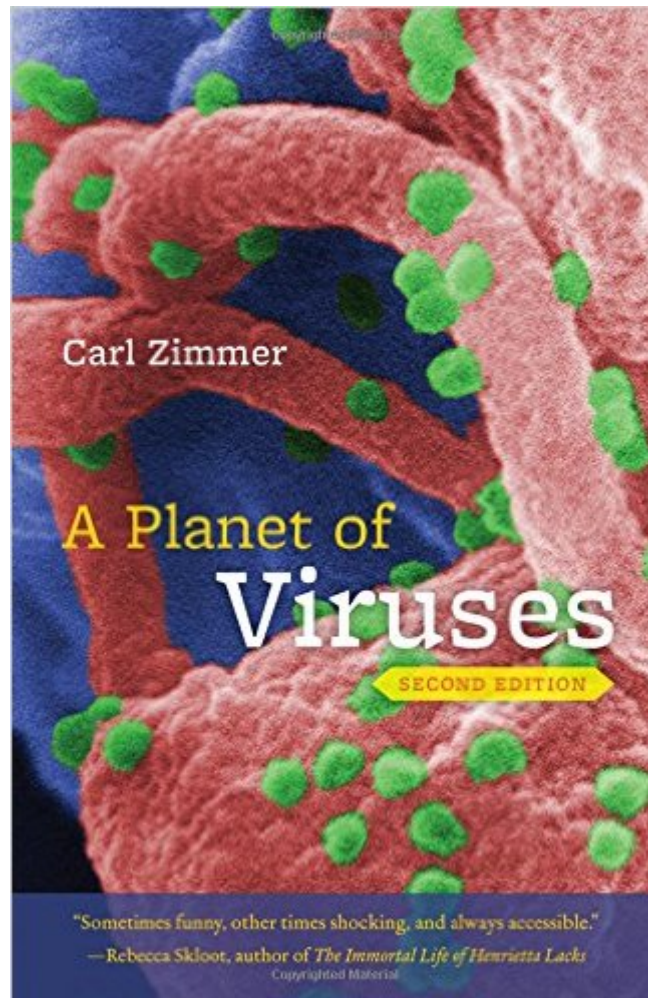


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A Planet Of Viruses: Second Edition



Synopsis

The past year has been one of viral panic—panic about viruses, that is. Through headlines, public health warnings, and at least one homemade hazmat suit, we were reminded of the powerful force of viruses. They are the smallest living things known to science, yet they can hold the entire planet in their sway. *A Planet of Viruses* is Carl Zimmer's eye-opening look at the hidden world of viruses. Zimmer, the popular science writer and author of National Geographic's award-winning blog *The Loom*, has updated this edition to include the stories of new outbreaks, such as Ebola, MERS, and chikungunya virus; new scientific discoveries, such as a hundred-million-year-old virus that infected the common ancestor of armadillos, elephants, and humans; and new findings that show why climate change may lead to even deadlier outbreaks. Zimmer's lucid explanations and fascinating stories demonstrate how deeply humans and viruses are intertwined. Viruses helped give rise to the first life-forms, are responsible for many of our most devastating diseases, and will continue to control our fate for centuries. Thoroughly readable, and as reassuring as it is frightening, *A Planet of Viruses* is a fascinating tour of a formidable hidden world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book provides a good, engaging introduction to viruses for complete beginners. I picked this book up because I hear a lot about viruses these days (Ebola, Zika, HPV among many) but I didn't know exactly what viruses are. My understanding was just "tiny things that cause diseases". It turns out they are way more than that (of course). The author will walk you through a number of examples

to show how they came about, what they do to animals (not everything they do is harmful as I learned), and where they are headed. For beginners like myself, these examples are chock-full of surprises. The book might even change the way you think about your identity as a human. The DNA is more fluid than I thought. Thanks, viruses... or not... I was expecting to see a more structured approach to the subject, as in, section 1: the structure and components of viruses, section 2: the difference between virus and bacteria, section 3: their purposes... and so forth. You won't see these in this book. The author jumps right into examples, which made me a bit disappointed. Knowing what I know now, though, I think the author did a good job by working with actual viruses rather than theories or models. Virology is still young and there are lots of things yet to be discovered. After finishing the book, I still don't know why viruses exist in the first place, but probably nobody knows why (yet). Also, it's hard to draw the line between virus and bacteria (you'll see that there is a kind of virus that acts like a bacteria). Plus, there is a controversy over the vital status of viruses: are they living or just stuff? It's probably too soon to draw a holistic picture that encompasses all the viruses. And this frustrating fact itself is one of the exciting lessons I take away from the book. Overall, a really good read to beginners.

Nice primer on the world of viruses where we learn that the word virus 'originally signified either a life-giving substance or a deadly venom'. Perhaps reflecting etymology, it is no longer entirely clear whether viruses are alive or dead. However, they contain very few genes and are unable to reproduce without infecting other organisms. Apart from the recently discovered mimivirus and mamavirus, viruses are generally about one hundred times smaller than bacteria which in turn are about one hundred times smaller than a typical mammal cell. Nobody really knows when and how the first virus originated but what is clear is that viruses are ubiquitous. Both outside and inside us! There are hundreds of trillions of them in the oceans, in the earth crust, and in the atmosphere. In the oceans, there are about one million of virus-derived genes, including some that encode proteins involved in photosynthesis. It is estimated that about 10% of the oxygen in the air is produced with proteins that have a viral origin. 'We humans are an inextricable blend of mammal and virus'. About 8% of the human genome is derived from ancient retroviruses! For comparison, our estimated 20000 genes represent less than 2% of our genome!

I'm a big Carl Zimmer fan already and this was on par. Carl Zimmer has a way of making microbiology concepts so relatable. I wish all of my friends would read this so they could understand why I get so giddy to talk about syncytin! The book is concise and makes science readable for

laypeople. Each chapter is an article on a different subject, which makes it easy to still adore parts of the book even if a chapter or two don't resonate with you. Highly recommend! Also, I purchased the first edition AND the second edition. There do not appear to be huge differences between the two, though some of the research on ERVWE1 probably is missing from the first edition.

A Planet of Viruses by Carl Zimmer is a great little pocket reference on what viruses are, the history of viruses, the scientific struggles, and the good, the bad, and the ugly. So much information jammed into a little over 100 pages. Beautiful imagery as well. And, a nice reference section that ties this one up with a bow. If you want to know more about viruses without being saturated in scientific terminology and overwritten explanations, this is the book for you. It is an enjoyable quick read.

Nice overview on several viruses. Plenty of facts on each to wet your appetite. Go buy other books if you want explicit details.

Sort of gross, but very interesting. And it's a really short book for the price.

A great book to introduce the non-science public to modern and old virology.

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