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A fascinating insight into human cultural history, and how closely it has been influenced at every step by microbes, our deadly companions.

Explains the biology and life-stories of microbes such as smallpox, flu, malaria, HIV, and MRSA, and why they have evolved to be so effective.

Includes stories of devastation wrought by epidemics and pandemics, and examines controversies over the real cause of the black death.

Reveals how microbes may have forced the exodus of early man from Africa.

Ever since we started huddling together in communities, the story of human history has been inextricably entwined with the story of microbes. They have evolved and spread amongst us, shaping our culture through infection, disease, and pandemic. At the same time, our changing human culture has itself influenced the evolutionary path of microbes. Dorothy H. Crawford here shows that one cannot be truly understood without the other.

Beginning with a dramatic account of the SARS pandemic at the start of the 21st century, she takes us back in time to follow the interlinked history of microbes and man, taking an up-to-date look at ancient plagues and epidemics, and identifying key changes in the way humans have lived - such as our move from hunter-gatherer to farmer to city-dweller - which made us vulnerable to microbe attack.

Showing how we live our lives today - with increasing crowding and air travel - puts us once again at risk, Crawford asks whether we might ever conquer microbes completely, or whether we need to take a more microbe-centric view of the world. Among the possible answers, one thing becomes clear: that for generations to come, our deadly companions will continue to shape human history.

Readership: Readers of popular science, especially those with an interest in microbiology and human health. Professional medics, microbiologists, as well as historians looking for a new insight into the forces that have shaped thousands of years of human culture and civilisation.

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