

# Microbe Hunters Review

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In a cultural and political landscape that often fails to appreciate the incredible possibilities and knowledge that scientific progress offers, books like de Kruif's *Microbe Hunters* remain important. While his writing is certainly dramatized and can oversensationalize the work of the first pioneers of microbiology, de Kruif does manage to convey the key facts of their discoveries while maintaining a thoroughly entertaining narrative.

Learning about the meticulous work of, for example, the stalwart Robert Koch in *Microbe Hunters* is fun and exciting. The reader is swept into the curious mind of an innovator who, through countless experiments, proves the causes of deadly diseases such as anthrax and tuberculosis. De Kruif manages to walk you through these experiments in a way that is entertaining, one by one, explaining how they were designed to answer an important question (such as "What are these things . . . are they microbes . . . are they alive?"), showing how new techniques to answer these questions were first developed (like cell plating and microscopy), and then finally how that led to the discovery (de Kruif, 1953, p. 103). By going through this process, the reader learns about the foundations of modern biological science and understands how critical it was to develop it so that the world wouldn't be plagued by so many deadly diseases.

Although de Kruif employs dramatization—depicting Koch as a "backwoodsman", Behring's risky experiments as "murderous gropings", and Mechnikov as a "wild Russian"—he uses these characterizations to underscore the magnitude of their scientific contributions. Even if readers receive a somewhat stylized view of these scientists, de Kruif ensures their crucial discoveries and impact on modern science remain clear, emphasizing the enduring importance of their work.

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\*This author wrote this paper for Biology 485: The Nobel Prizes taught by Dr. Brett Palmero.