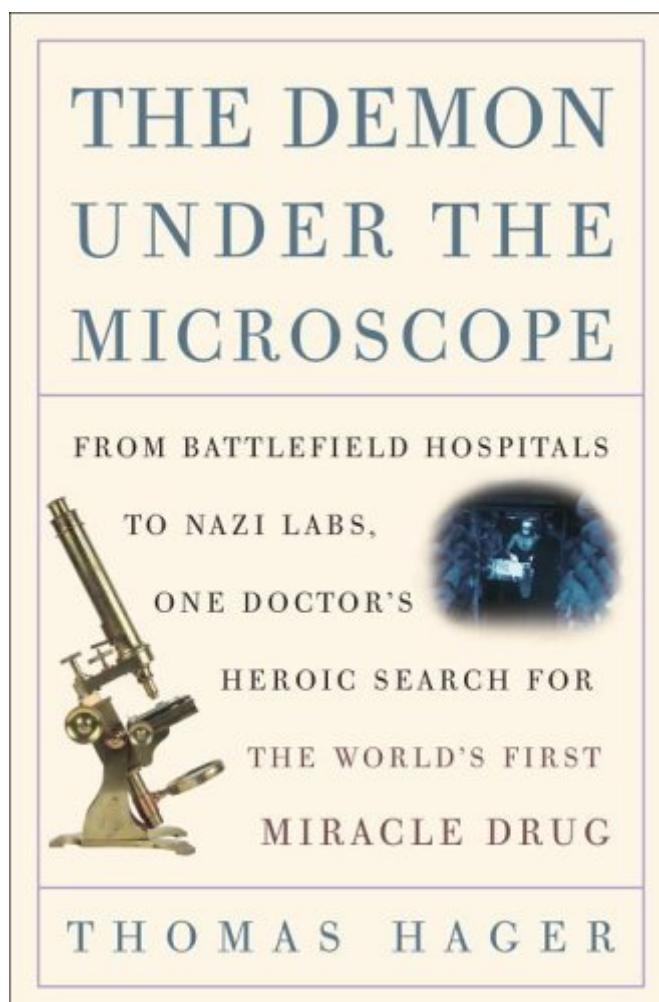


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# The Demon Under The Microscope: From Battlefield Hospitals To Nazi Labs, One Doctor's Heroic Search For The World's First Miracle Drug



## **Synopsis**

In *The Demon Under the Microscope*, Thomas Hager chronicles the dramatic history of sulfa, the first antibiotic and the drug that shaped modern medicine. The Nazis discovered it. The Allies won the war with it. It conquered diseases, changed laws, and single-handedly launched the era of antibiotics. Sulfa saved millions of lives—among them those of Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr.—but its real effects are even more far reaching. Sulfa changed the way new drugs were developed, approved, and sold; transformed the way doctors treated patients; and ushered in the era of modern medicine. The very concept that chemicals created in a lab could cure disease revolutionized medicine, taking it from the treatment of symptoms and discomfort to the eradication of the root cause of illness. A strange and colorful story, *The Demon Under the Microscope* illuminates the vivid characters, corporate strategy, individual idealism, careful planning, lucky breaks, cynicism, heroism, greed, hard work, and the central (though mistaken) idea that brought sulfa to the world. This is a fascinating scientific tale with all the excitement and intrigue of a great suspense novel.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

This book gave a historical account of the impacts and treatment of infectious disease and the rolls of physicians, pharmacists, chemical companies, individual scientists, government regulations, consumers, colonialism, and two world wars before, during, and after the discovery of the antibiotic properties of sulfa drugs. This book is part biography of the Nobel Prize winning German research scientist who tested hundreds of dye-based chemicals on thousands of infected research animals, as well as in vitro on various pathogenic bacteria. The author provides background on the state of infectious disease in hospitals, among general populations, in colonial wars, and during WWI and II and the research and treatment trends at the time. He also notes the lack of standardized large-scale, double-blind human drug trials and points out how haphazard and, by today's standards, unethical testing occurred on African citizens, institutionalized mental health patients, orphans and prisoners, military personnel, and uninformed patients. There were also unethical forced mutilations, infections, and treatments conducted in Nazi concentration camps. Some prisoners were forced to work as slave labourers at the chemical companies, as well. The author goes on to explore the barely-regulated US pharmaceutical environment of snake-oil remedies marketed directly to consumers, who diagnosed themselves or consulted druggists and bought whatever they wanted for self-medication. The proliferation of sulfa-based remedies from less reliable chemical companies led to multiple deaths and finally led to federal laws updating and strengthening the regulatory power of the FDA. This is a highly relevant story in this age of government deregulation.

A lovely, easy to read book. In addition to talking about antibiotics it covers a great deal of history in an interesting way. It was shocking to realize just how bad healthcare less than 100 years ago. The book is written in a very accessible way and you don't need prior medical or historical knowledge.

I love the sort of book -- the history of something I know little about told well. Others can do a full review; I just wanted to give it 5 stars.

Very good book! I had no idea how or where antibacterials/ antibiotics were discovered

This book is a must-read for those entering the pharmaceutical research field. I was surprised to

learn all that went into the development of a drug that was commonly administered in my childhood and how many lives were saved. Had I been born only a decade earlier, things might have gone a lot different for me. It also brings me to an appreciation for the role of the FDA, which while not perfect, largely protects us from tragedies such as a happened in the US with the infamous elixir (AKA dipropylene glycol).

The Demon Under the Microscope is a well written history of medical research from Greek times through WWII relating attempts to find a "cure" for the effects of bacteria in the human body. It focuses on the 1930s and 1940s during which sulfur compounds were the primary agent. The book has wonderful insight into the methods, strengths and weaknesses of the research methods and the impact of the pharmaceutical industries on the marketing of the product. It is a fascinating read.

Excellent book on the battle to conquer strept. We don't think a whole lot about strept now. When our kids get sick with this bug/microbe it usually causes a sore throat. This is what doctors test for. But in my grandmother's time, streptococcus of any kind could kill you. Streptococcus infections caused sepsis, wound infections, and if it traveled from the throat to the heart, it could cause rheumatic fever. I know about this because my grandmother ended up with it. The Germans were the first to find something that would work on streptococcus. Before antibiotics existed sulfa drugs were used. This is the story of the research done by Bayer and other companies in Germany to find something that would prevent the many deaths seen during war time from disease. For the most part, during both the Civil War and World War 1 (and the other small wars in between these years) more men died from disease, including gangrene and wound infections, than died from bullets. So the race was on among all countries including Great Britain, France, and Germany to find something that could cure men of disease, and get them back to the fronts. This of course, was of more concern than civilian deaths. Streptococcus was also known to cause puerperal fever in women who were delivering children. This was another huge concern for many doctors. This race to find a drug that would help prevent infections led to some of the typical fiascos seen in the science community. These men are very competitive, especially when other countries are known to be searching for the same thing. These competitions mean that mistakes will be made, usually someone's feelings will get hurt due to being ignored when awards are given, jealousy runs rampant, etc. All of those things happened here in this story. What's interesting isn't just the research done, and the men involved, but how short the use of sulfa drugs actually was. We still use some sulfa drugs, such as sulfonamide, but it is known that many of the antibiotics we currently use are

causing resistance among bacteria. So it might come to the point we will need to use more sulfa drugs again in the future. Interesting story...

I love all things that deal with biology and microbiology and this book is a great view of early medicine development. It's interesting and has many facts I didn't know about! Great read for anyone!

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