



The Cockroach Papers: A Compendium of History and Lore

Richard Schweid

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Skittering figures of urban legend—and a ubiquitous reality—cockroaches are nearly as abhorred as they are ancient. Even as our efforts to exterminate them have developed into ever more complex forms of chemical warfare, roaches' basic design of six legs, two hypersensitive antennae, and one set of voracious mandibles has persisted unchanged for millions of years. But as Richard Schweid shows in *The Cockroach Papers*, while some species of these evolutionary superstars do indeed plague our kitchens and restaurants, exacerbate our asthma, and carry disease, our belief in their total villainy is ultimately misplaced.

Traveling from New York City to Louisiana, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Morocco, Schweid blends stories of his own squirm-inducing roach encounters with meticulous research to spin a tale both humorous and harrowing. As he investigates roaches' more nefarious interactions with our species—particularly with those of us living at the margins of society—Schweid also explores their astonishing diversity, how they mate, what they'll eat, and what we've written about them (from Kafka and Nelson Algren to *archy and mehitabel*). Knowledge soon turns into respect, and Schweid looks beyond his own fears to arrive at an uncomfortable truth: We humans are no more peaceful, tidy, or responsible about taking care of the Earth or each other than these tiny creatures that swarm in the dark corners of our minds, homes, and cereal boxes.

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