



The Billion-Dollar Molecule: The Quest for the Perfect Drug

Barry Werth

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Join journalist Barry Werth as he pulls back the curtain on Vertex, a start-up pharmaceutical company, and witness firsthand the intense drama being played out in the pioneering and hugely profitable field of drug research. Founded by Joshua Boger, a dynamic Harvard- and Merck-trained scientific whiz kid, Vertex is dedicated to designing -- atom by atom -- both a new life-saving immunosuppressant drug, and a drug to combat the virus that causes AIDS.

You will be hooked from start to finish, as you go from the labs, where obsessive, fiercely competitive scientists struggle for a breakthrough, to Wall Street, where the wheeling and dealing takes on a life of its own, as Boger courts investors and finally decides to take Vertex public. Here is a fascinating no-holds-barred account of the business of science, which includes an updated epilogue about the most recent developments in the quest for a drug to cure AIDS.

The Billion-Dollar Molecule: The Quest for the Perfect Drug Details

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From Reader Review **The Billion-Dollar Molecule: The Quest for the Perfect Drug** for online ebook

Biafra says

This book is bloody brilliant. Follows Joshua Boger and crew as they take Vertex from an idea to a working pharmaceutical company. Along the way it outlines the history of several others outside the company and how their work influenced the projects chosen within the company. The writing is clear and one is left with a palpable sense of excitement for both the science and the biotech industry in general.

Mark Dunn says

A really interesting read about a biotech startup (Vertex), going from initial idea to late trials of a number of drugs. Looks at some of the history of pharma, as well as the rise of the biotechs and the interplay with Wall St. An easy, entertaining read and a good primer for anyone starting off in this industry (or considering it)

Stephen Russell says

Good writing transcends genre, a fact that Barry Werth highlights in *The Billion Dollar Molecule*. What first began as a research assignment in preparing for my own manuscript, this book knocked down my expectations of a scientific tome written in and about the 1990s and replaced that notion with a powerfully written narrative about one man's goal to succeed. The pace is crisp, the writing precise, and the verbs muscular enough to push through 400+ pages of dense science. Werth shines most when he uses analogies to make abstract concepts understandable. Perhaps the best testament to this enjoyable book (albeit a bit too long for the story being told) is that I bought the sequel, *The Antidote*, on the day I finished *The Billion Dollar Molecule*.

Andy Oram says

Full of evocative writing and nearly incredible anecdotes, this book illuminates one of the most important fields of research and development while providing lots of human stories and ethical questions to chomp on. The characters are so inspiring as to be intimidating. I mean, here are whole generations of researchers who spent a decade in higher learning and then devoted twenty-hour days for months on end to alleviate some of the most devastating illnesses affecting humanity. And what have you done with your life? The book also contains some intriguing psychology, because the main actors indicate that they're in the game for far more than money or glory.

Notwithstanding the heroism of all these protagonists, they also engage in some morally questionable decisions in the pursuit of claims

to fame and funding for their companies. One has to end up acknowledging that, in the strivings to advance human health and knowledge it is hard to determine what is proper and what is necessary.

Yang Zheng says

On the back cover, Fortune calls it “one of the 75 smartest books we know”. Not much else can be said. Brilliantly detailed in the science and business, but in a manner digestible to the layman. Amazing. Can’t wait to read The Antidote.

Ron says

Werth's book about a company's inception and its revolutionary use of rational drug design should be required reading for all in the sciences. It highlights to amazing extents the pros and cons of academia and industry, and as a current PhD student, I can fully relate to the issues. The scientific struggles of publishing and politics are all excruciatingly detailed, and you're left in awe of the immense strength and will of the characters. Werth's prose is riveting as well. I wish there were a more recent book of equal calibre, detailing maybe a company's trials in genomic medicine.

Brian says

This book recounts the history of the 1990's founding of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, one of the first companies to "design" drugs rather than discover them. Traditionally, pharma scientists would screen thousands of compounds looking for signs of biological activity, then test the active finds against a host of diseases. Josh Boger (hard "g"), the Vertex founder sought to describe the structure of the active molecule involved in a disease, then construct a molecule that would "attach" to that disease molecule at the active site in such a way that it would block its action, thus shutting down the disease process. Sounds simple, but it's quite difficult, though poentially more efficient than traditional discovery.

The book details the personalities and egos involved in high stakes scientific development and the struggle for funding. It's an interesting read, made even more so for me because I did some consulting work with Vertex a couple of years ago.

Aman Agarwal says

A nose dive into the thrilling world of scientific research, this book takes one on an exciting journey of a biotech start-up named Vertex Pharmaceuticals, and also an amazing history of money and science.

Led by Joshua Boger, the center of the company's story, Vertex takes on the biggest drug firms in the world in a race to create the next big immunosuppressant. Vertex deals with fearsome problems and competitors

and takes risks and decisions not for the faint of heart, and keeps you glued to the story.

The book also takes the reader into the history of all drug research, through the 20th Century and beyond. It takes you straight into fast-paced million dollar labs, through legendary Harvard department corridors, and into the historical successes and failures of the most famous chemists of all time, right from Paul Ehrlich to modern whiz-kids.

The best part of the book is Barry Werth's inimitable style and penchant for narration. It gives an insight into the gritty details of drug approval, the fierce competition for credit and patents, and a world where money drives science. Although, those new to this kind of literature might feel at some points that they are being bombarded with information which they can't process at the speed of the plot.

If you start reading this book, you will learn a lot about how industrial research works and why. If you're someone who wants to know about what R&D is like and what is expected of those who intend to work in it, this book would give you a solid idea. Also, for history fans, this book is a gem. It will tell you about things that miss the modern history textbooks, a history which ran parallel to the one we know, creating a deep mark on the latter all the way.

Pablo Mora says

Great book if what you wanna have a inside perspective of the pharmaceutical industry. This book will wreck some people belief about the wickeness of the industry as well as realize how difficult to develop a drug is and the huge amount of people striving to their limits in their personal and professional life for a simple molecule.

Ankit Gupta says

Inspiring to me as someone who works in this space, but was definitely a bit slow in the middle.

Michael Ellenberger says

Well-written book; enjoyable not only for the scientific difficulties of bringing a drug to market, but for Werth's depiction of the scientists that face these challenges.

I look forward to reading the follow-up.

Tim Gingerich says

This book is perhaps best appreciated by those working in science and with an interest in starting up a new business. It was inspiring to read about the incredible hard work and sacrifice that some people have made to achieve their research goals. It was filled with great anecdotes and quotes. Example:

"Part of this elusiveness was Boger's determination not to interfere with researchers he believed to be at the top of their fields. Part to, was an appreciation for the rhythms of science, rhythms that in almost any other endeavor would be maddening; months and years of unrelieved failure punctuated, if one was fortunate, by sudden leaps ahead and if one wasn't, by prospects of everlasting darkness. Patience and detachment were necessities."

Hannah says

Billion dollar molecule takes you to the lab and keeps you there. It also takes you to Wall Street. To the hallowed halls of prestigious colleges and fancy conference rooms across the globe. To the work bench and to the corner office.

I found the technical parts of the book to drag a bit, but overall it was a fascinating read on the workings of the drug industry, and one company's quest to develop and market the perfect drug.

Viktoriya says

I liked this book. It provided an excellent overview of pharmaceutical industry. The book describes beginning of small biotech company. It offers very interesting perspective and numerous insights into operation and culture of start up company. I found this book however hard to read sometimes because the author went into enormous details that I sometimes felt were unnecessary. Otherwise, the book is great for those how are looking to learn about this industry.

Xinyu says

Anyone who has done some biomedical research would be very familiar with the uncertainty and frustration the author described. This is definitely not an very exciting story as I would imagine for a successful young company; there were very little eureka moments in the process - most of them were repeated trials and excruciating failures.

If I had read the book five years ago, I would probably have reconsidered my decision of doing a PhD in experimental biology.

This book is amazing at revealing all aspects of scientists and doing science and business. It reads very true and sincere. It is a book that anyone curious of biomedical or pharmaceutical industry should read.
