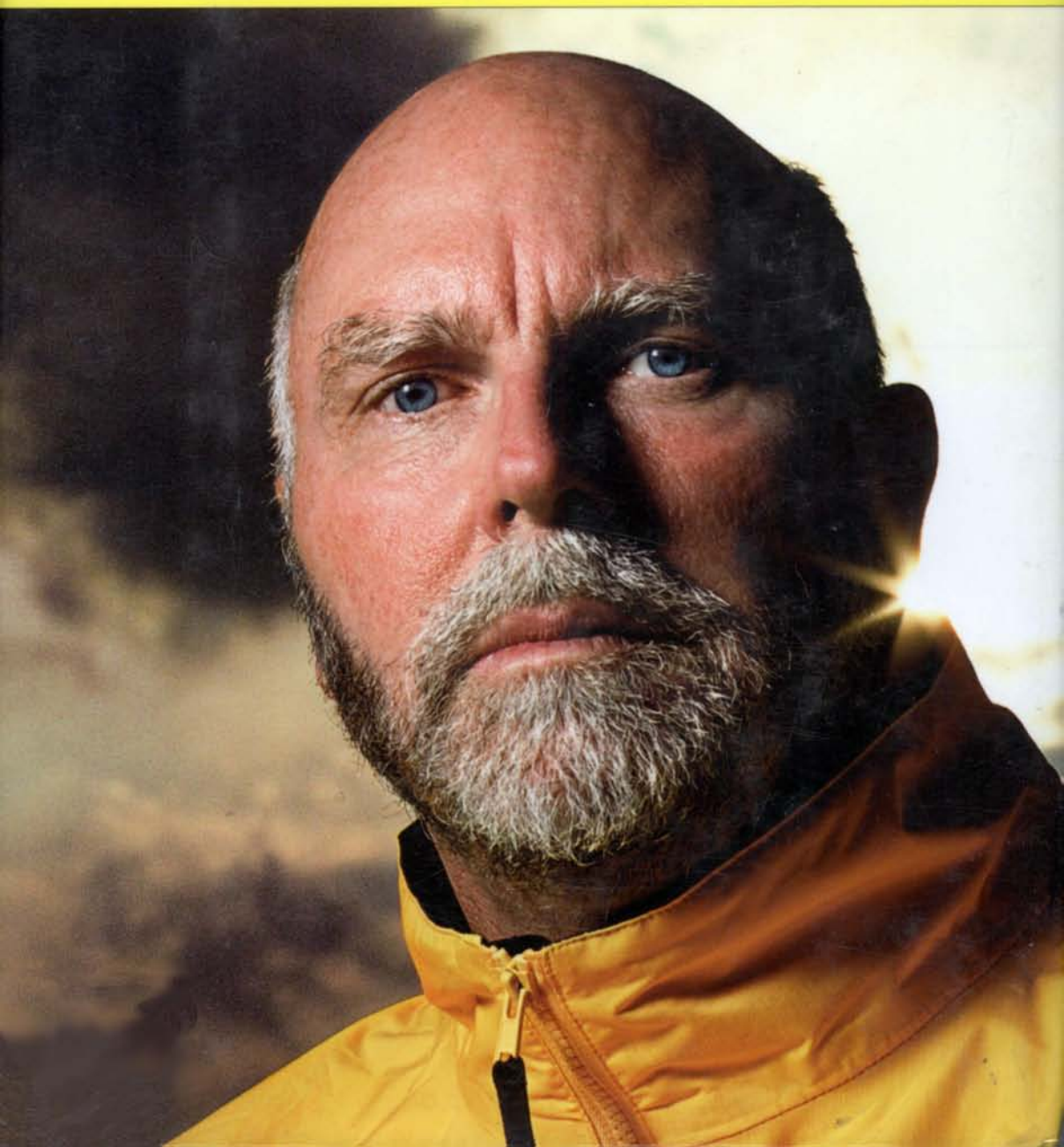


# A LIFE DECODED

*My Genome: My Life*

J. CRAIG VENTER



Of all the extraordinary scientific achievements of the past century, perhaps none can match the deciphering of the human genetic code, both for its technical brilliance and for its implications for our future. It has charted a landscape in which we will discover the most intricate workings of our species, the particularities of our own individual genetic makeup, and the promise of novel approaches to health and medicine that will mark a new stage in human development, one in which inherited biology is no longer necessarily destiny.

*A Life Decoded* is the story of this singular milestone in our history, told by the man who through a combination of vision, tenacity, ingenuity, and insight challenged conventional wisdom and refuted his critics to reveal the human genetic code. Growing up in California, Craig Venter was an unremarkable student, with little interest in his schoolwork and even less motivation to complete his education. But being drafted as a Navy medic in Vietnam piqued his interest in science and medicine, and after jump-starting his education, he received advanced degrees and quickly established himself as a gifted and outspoken scientist. At the National Institutes of Health he introduced novel techniques for rapid gene discovery, and at his own research institute in 1995 sequenced the first genome of a living species in history, the bacterium *Haemophilus influenzae*.

That success prompted him to take on the dauntingly more ambitious goal of the entire human genome—billions of letters of genetic code that would test the limits of both human and computational abilities. Venter not only set himself this almost inconceivably ambitious goal but also announced he could reach it more quickly, and for far less money, than the government-sponsored Human Genome Project—a prediction he fulfilled in 2001. The story of that quest is at the heart of *A Life Decoded*, and

(continued from front flap)

rarely has the chronicle of a scientific adventure been more dramatic or, ultimately, more profoundly moving. The account of the decoding of the human genome is, on one hand, a thrilling story of detection, featuring machines that refused to function the way they should have, as well as flashes of virtuosity from an increasingly pressured, small band of dedicated researchers. But it is also a revealing, and often troubling, look at how science is increasingly practiced today—a discipline in which financial demands, political machinations, and ego all too often undermine the pursuit of knowledge that might save lives.

But reading the human genome is only the beginning of a revolution in our relationship with the world. Craig Venter has built on that foundation, as he explains in the closing pages of *A Life Decoded*, to investigate the genomes of the atmosphere and the oceans, to transplant genetic material from one organism into another, and to create synthetic life—all projects with the potential to address the most urgent problems of the twenty-first century. That, finally, is the purest goal of science and lies at the heart of this inspiring and remarkable book.

J. CRAIG VENTER is one of the leading scientists of the twenty-first century. A pioneer in the world of genomic research, he is recognized for his visionary contributions to the field. In February 2001, Venter published the completed sequence of the human genome. He is the founder and president of the J. Craig Venter Institute. He lives near Washington, D.C.

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J. CRAIG VENTER

"It's thanks to Venter, aggressive and hard-nosed as he is,  
that the world can read the score of the human symphony."

—*Time* (Person of the Year 2000)

"[Venter is] not just trying to understand how life works;  
he's trying to make it work for him, and for us."

—*The Atlantic*

"Venter alone is taking the measure of life's true diversity  
and dreaming up new life-forms at the same time."

—*Wired*

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To my son, Christopher Emrys Rae Venter, and  
my parents, John and Elizabeth Venter

