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Hidden away within living tissues, parasites are all around us_and inside us. Yet, despite their unsavory characteristics, as we find in this compulsively readable book, parasites have played an enormous role in civilizations through time and around the globe. Parasites: Tales of Humanity's Most Unwelcome Guests puts amoebae, roundworms, tapeworms, mites, and others at the center of the action as human cultures have evolved and declined. It shows their role in exploration, war, and even terrorist plots, often through an unpredictable ripple effect. It reveals them as invisible threats in our food, water, and luggage; as invaders that have shaped behaviors and taboos; and as unexpected partners in such venues as crime scene investigations. Parasites also describes their evolution and life histories and considers their significant benefits. Deftly blending the sociological with the scientific, this natural and social history of parasites looks closely at a fascinating, often disgusting group of organisms and discovers that they are in fact an integral thread in the web of life.