

ENDPOINTS NEWS

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The Endpoints 11: A group of disruptive upstarts on a do-or-die mission to launch new meds

by JOHN CARROLL — on January 10, 2018 08:48 AM EST



With my first selection of the Endpoints 11, I'm getting started on generation 2.0 of my idea of top companies that just may be headed for greatness.

There are several key attributes that characterize each of the E11, and help me hedge my bets. Each represents an important trend in biotech creation.

Most have top teams that are well recognized for earlier successes. Experienced biotech execs these days can generally have their pick of the litter when it comes to new companies angling for a launch. So when you see a prominent biotech exec make the transition out of incubation and onto the stage — often alongside close associates that they have known and worked with for years — it may not guarantee a winner, but it sure is comforting when smart, successful people love the science behind a startup.

That will serve as my segue into technology. Me-too drugs have been discredited for years now. Payers may use them to pick the lock on lower prices, but it's a woeful development strategy. Every company in this year's maiden E11 is swinging for the fences, looking to drug the undruggable or race with ambitious rivals to achieve something remarkable.

So scientific ambition is key.

Enough money to get through to the next stage of human data is critical.

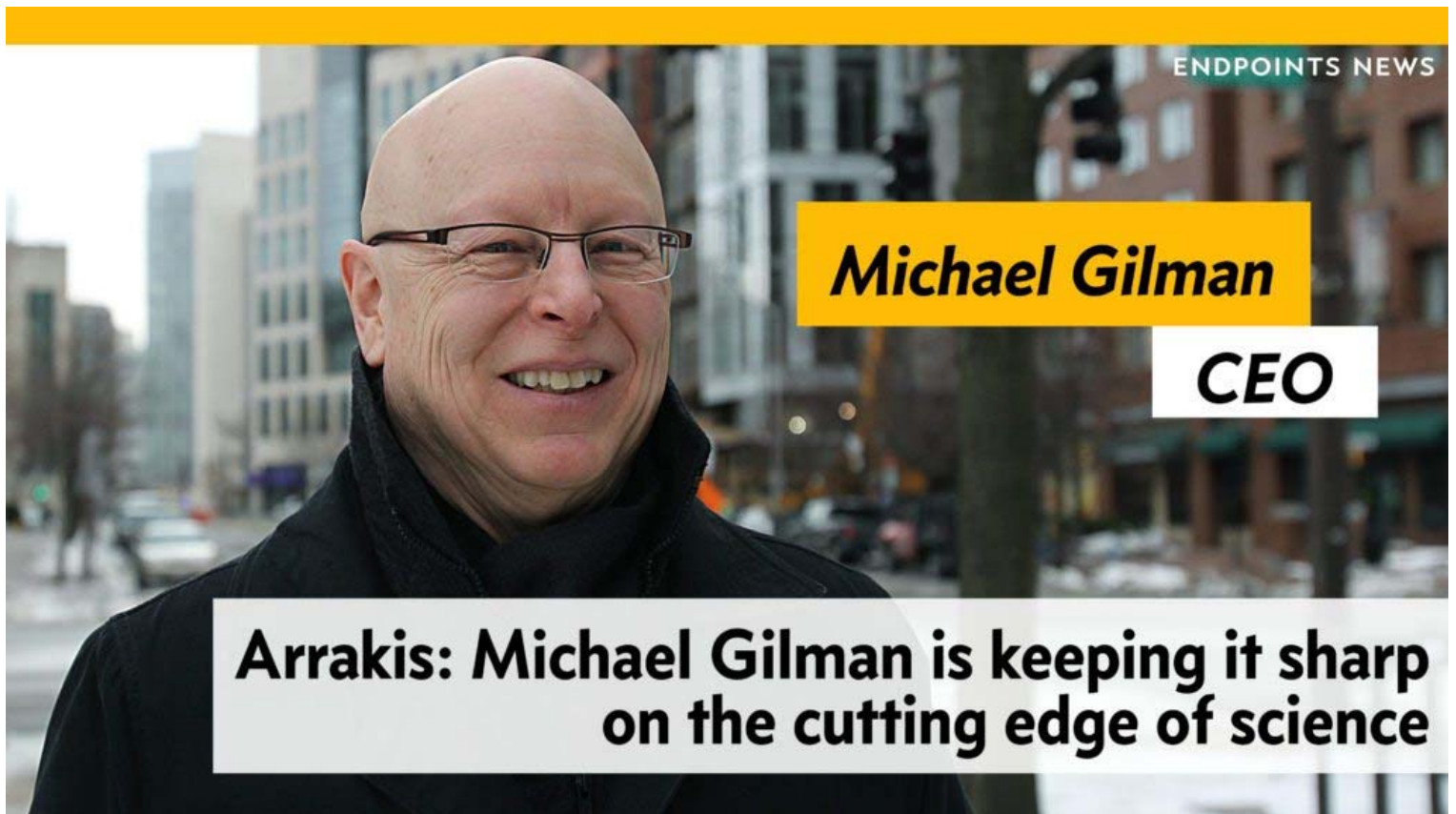
If anyone in the E11 fail, it likely won't be because they were starved for cash. And this business isn't cheap.

The right partner can be everything in this business, helping make all the difference in picking up speed in the clinic and providing the kind of commercial clout needed to move markets. That's another big factor in the list.

If there's one overarching theme I'd like to highlight most, it's that drug development is a global pursuit. The US may be where the money is in terms of windfall profits, and it may still drive the lion's share of the development work as the industry feels the full flush of cash coursing through labs, but the science is international. So is much of the clinical work. These companies span three continents, from North America to Europe and Asia.



ARRAKIS THERAPEUTICS



CEO: Michael Gilman
Chief scientist: Russ Petter
Based: Waltham, MA

The big idea: There is no place on earth that can match the combination of entrepreneurial experience, deep-pocketed investor enthusiasm and ambitious science that the Cambridge/Boston hub boasts of. And one of the best triple threat CEOs in the region is Michael Gilman, the CEO at Arrakis.

Gilman isn't just a scientist and drug development exec, with a PhD from UC Berkeley and stints at Biogen and Ariad. He's also founded two startups — Stromedix and Padlock — that went on to buyouts. Arrakis made three launches. And he just started his fourth enterprise, working on the knowledge that he has the experience and teams in place to juggle both just fine.

Gilman learned all about asset-centric focuses through his close connection with Atlas Venture, but Arrakis is every bit a platform company, looking to develop small molecules to target disease-causing RNA. And Gilman's background gave him exactly the kind of experience he needed to see the potential CSO and company founder Russ Petter was working with after he stumbled on Petter honing the bioinformatics tools, assays and chemical libraries needed to get started at Arrakis.

Arrakis was out the public gate first, but we noted a recent significant addition (<https://endpts.com/upstart-expansion-bags-a-55m-launch-round-to-join-the-hunt-for-rna-targeting-small-molecules/>) to this new field, adding credibility as well as new scientific insights providing support for what this biotech is out to accomplish. It's good to be in front of a trend, but anything promising attracts rivals.

Where the money comes from: Canaan Partners, Advent Life Sciences, Pfizer, Celgene, Osage University Partners, and the late Henri Termeer chipped in to the A round. The UK's Advent and Termeer helped seed the initial work.