

Death From a Distance

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Paul M. Bingham

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In a universe where life could have formed on almost any planet, it is pure luck that Earth has what it takes to support a rich and varied animal kingdom. It's also amazing that humans developed as we did: from our weapons to our metropolises to the interpersonal relationships in our families, no other animal has developed a way of life quite like we have. In *Death from a Distance*, Paul M. Bingham and Joanne Souza explore this "human uniqueness" and how it guided us to our present world.

Carefully constructed and meticulously detailed, this book spans nearly two million years of human evolution. By unifying biology, history, anthropology, and the various social sciences, Bingham and Souza look at various species and show how humans took a different path. The head of a lion pride kills off the former leader's infants, but humans learned to practice adoption. Every animal can communicate, but humans developed a system of speaking, signing, and writing. Baboons learned to hunt for young gazelles by scaring them out of the tall grass, but humans developed atlatl and bow weapons.

These are only a few examples that Bingham, a molecular and evolutionary biologist, and Souza, a research psychologist, use to outline their theory. Knowledgeable and passionate, they present their astounding arguments in a way that is eye-opening and sometimes challenging.

If the book suffers from any shortcoming, it may be the way the narrative is extensively cross-referenced. For example, "cooperative economic exchange" is discussed in chapter ten, and this is noted whenever the topic comes up again in the book. *Death from a Distance* is used as part of the authors' curriculum at Stony Brook University, so these cross-references may serve a purpose for their course. For general readers, however, it can be frustrating as this book needs to be read from beginning to end to be enjoyed and understood.

Another flaw may be the external endnotes, which can be downloaded from the authors' Web site. For authors who insist that anyone can be a scientist and say that doubt is an important scientific tool, it seems inconsistent to tell readers that they won't find the endnotes necessary, as they do on their Web site. Although there's a list of references, this book is too challenging to be organized this way. Not every general reader skips over the endnotes.

These faults aside, *Death from a Distance* is an interesting read. It comprehensively unifies what it means to be human and gives readers the skills to analyze how our humanness continues to shape our world. Scholars, students, and general readers will all come away from this book with new insight on the human experience.

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