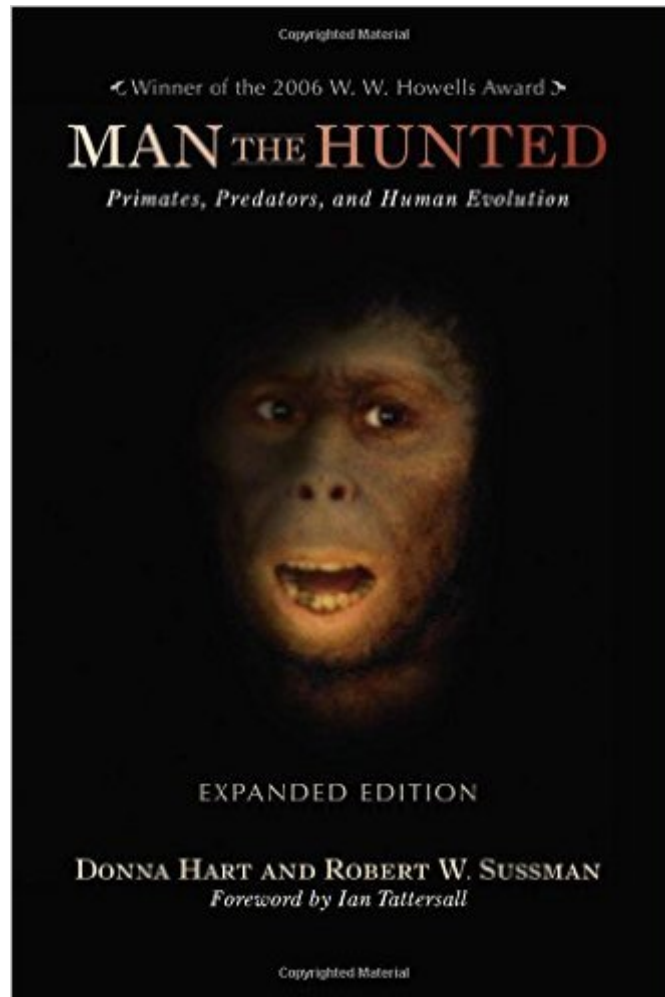


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Man The Hunted: Primates, Predators, And Human Evolution, Expanded Edition



Synopsis

A provocative view of human evolution that contends early humans occupied a far more vulnerable position in the food chain than we like to imagine.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A probably futile attempt at brevity may unbalance this somewhat toward the negative, so I'll say at the outset that I found *Man the Hunted* rewarding. It is dedicated to being boldly contrarian, and in order to manage that it resorts to straw men and either/or situations where it seems to me both/and would be better. Either hunter or hunted is the primary example: "Instead of *Man the Hunter*, we contend that *Man the Hunted* is a more accurate snapshot"(32). The question is why an oversimplified snapshot of any kind. Our species since the early Bronze Age tribes and Iron Age dynasties has waged wars aplenty, one in the middle of the last century that disposed of 50 million people. Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans, in just one small corner of the globe, were enough to send any curious scientist looking for genetic susceptibility to violence. Saying that chimps sometimes act wacky and that we "often act badly, maliciously, cruelly" by choice but not "as bipedal primates" doesn't get us very far. Cooperative, altruistic behavior within a group goes hand in hand with hostility toward other groups. "Sloppy science" and original sin aren't to blame for anthropology's interest in human aggression. Human aggression is. That puny hominids were hunted we can take for granted, and being hunted does promote social cooperation. Being hunted also raises nightmares and paranoid fear, however, and these can turn preemptively

aggressive. Hence group friendliness and outward hostility. We have heard quite a few times of late, "fight them over there so we don't have to fight them here," which means "kill them before they kill us." That's not an unusual rhetorical tactic.

My first huge issue is that the authors demonstrate throughout the book that they have no clue what The Theory of Evolution is. Given that Sussman claims to be a primatologist and that he claims to be working on preservation of endangered species in various parts of the world, we might, for example, expect something a bit beyond the following on the topic of the coevolution of predators and prey, "In other words, if prey evolve a new way to elude predators, predators evolve in the direction of overcoming the new strategy. Any major destabilization in the balance of predators and prey comes about because the prey have evolved some new way to elude predation; the predator then has to counteradapt or give up eating the newly elusive prey." (This he claims to cite from an expert in the first edition on page 40) A vague understanding of the Theory of Evolution shows this cannot be true. If a random mutation arose in a predator that enabled it to catch prey more easily it would obviously be selected FOR by evolution regardless of when it arose; the animal that carried that mutation would on average have more surviving descendants and would be "more fit" than other conspecifics. Mutations are random. Nothing says they will arise in prey before they arise in predator. Additionally, species obviously evolve to enter new environmental niches and exploit them, becoming predators of new prey. Even the most simple grasp many grade school kids have of The Theory of Evolution would allow a person to see that the statement above is complete nonsense and could not be believed true, unless we reject the Theory of Evolution completely. This was a funny one: "Should we then not worry that too many chimpanzees might be obliterated by their natural predators?"

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