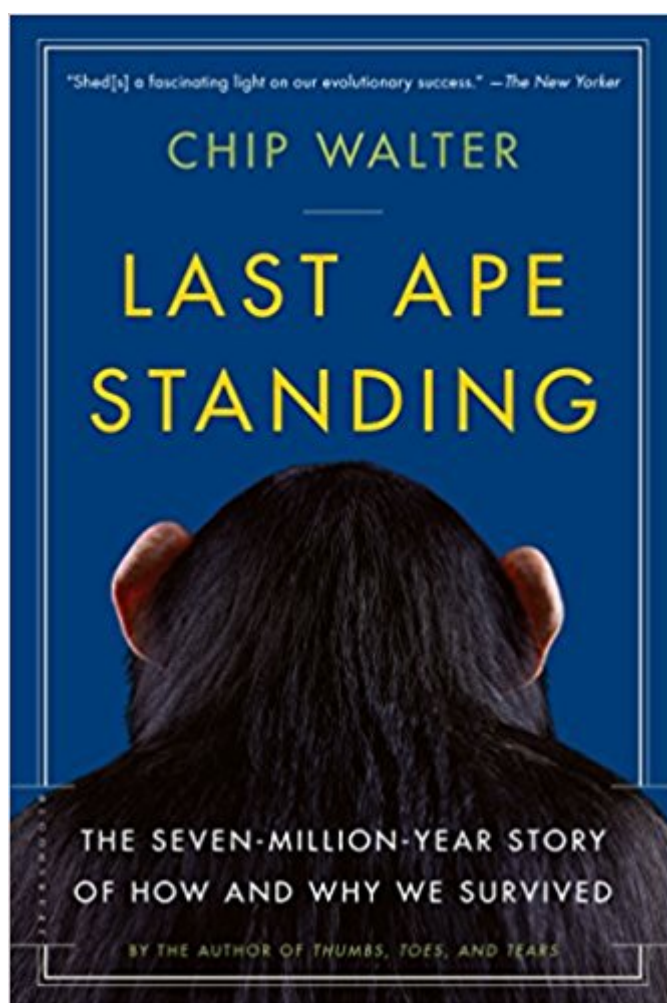


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Last Ape Standing: The Seven-Million-Year Story Of How And Why We Survived



Synopsis

Over the past 150 years scientists have discovered evidence that at least twenty-seven species of humans evolved on planet Earth. These weren't simply variations on apes, but upright-walking humans who lived side by side, competing, cooperating, sometimes even mating with our direct ancestors. Why did the line of ancient humans who eventually evolved into us survive when the others were shown the evolutionary door? Chip Walter draws on new scientific discoveries to tell the fascinating tale of how our survival was linked to our ancestors being born more prematurely than others, having uniquely long and rich childhoods, evolving a new kind of mind that made us resourceful and emotionally complex; how our highly social nature increased our odds of survival; and why we became self aware in ways that no other animal seems to be. Last Ape Standing also profiles the mysterious "others" who evolved with us-the Neanderthals of Europe, the "Hobbits" of Indonesia, the Denisovans of Siberia and the just-discovered Red Deer Cave people of China who died off a mere eleven thousand years ago. Last Ape Standing is evocative science writing at its best-a witty, engaging and accessible story that explores the evolutionary events that molded us into the remarkably unique creatures we are; an investigation of why we do, feel, and think the things we do as a species, and as people-good and bad, ingenious and cunning, heroic and conflicted.

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Customer Reviews

Utterly fascinating exposition of the latest theories on the evolution of modern Homo Sapiens, from the earliest fossilized traces to the present day. Not just the how, but the why, and told in a straightforward prose unfettered by the usual 7-syllable words anthropologists love to use to convince through obfuscation and confusion. What differentiates us from our past - and from our fellow denizens of the planet. How the people we once thought of as ignorant savages, the Neanderthals, left their heritage behind for us to enjoy - through interbreeding. Most of us whose ancestry is of the northern hemisphere still carry their DNA in our cells - from one to four percent. Why childhood is so much longer for us than for our cousins the primates, and why we are born utterly helpless - as well as upside-down (or at least compared to other animals). Sadly, the author gets bogged down in the latter part of the book, expounding at great length on the mysteries of the current human brain, and in a disconcertingly repetitive manner entirely out of character. As another reviewer wrote, it is almost as if there was a word count goal and the last part of the book was written to that end rather than to the subject at hand. Psychobabble is still psychobabble, whether in the guise of paleoanthropology or of psychiatry. Enjoy! But when you get bogged down in the last chapters, don't feel you've missed anything when you close the book in frustration - you'll have read the best part.

I hate being called a layman, but that is in fact what I am. I wanted to make a lot more money than my parents, and make it through my entire adult life without financial aid. I never became that paleoanthropologist I always wanted to be. So instead I read every book at every opportunity I can on the subject because it fascinates me. This book is fabulous, and is both understandable as well as technical. I have watched lectures by Chip Walter and he admits he is a much better writer than lecturer. He is a gifted writer, and truly takes the time to explain every point he makes in the book in clear concise terminology. I especially liked the chapter "The Voice Inside Your Head".....Fascinating.

I have to admit that I originally downloaded this book to my Kindle for two reasons, that it was a topic that my husband enjoys reading about and that it was on sale when I downloaded it...thinking

he'd like it and the price was right. Forget him, as when I started reading it, I was hooked right away! Mike is going to have to (impatiently) wait to read it next as I have just a few pages yet to finish. Unlike many other reviewers, I hate giving away all the fascinating theories and scientific research plus the DNA test results that contributed to the information in this book. Lets just teasingly say...you might not exactly be WHO you thought you are as a modern humanoid. Scientific evidence is changing all the time in this field as fresh finds are made of remains and new DNA testing sheds new light on our origins. READ, LEARN and CONSIDER....and finally.... if all of our big toes start curling back underneath...we are quite possibly all in evolutionary trouble! Enough clues given...now buy it! This book is an amazing read and so well written, the author really knows how to keep the ball rolling on a topic some people might find a little boring...Boring it certainly is NOT.

I learned a lot! Painlessly! The author's casual, chatty writing style conveyed information with infectious exuberance. Throw away the old evolutionary chart depicting a single line of knuckle-walkers developing into present day humans. The simplistic idea that Neanderthals were our only competition has been scientifically discounted. The fact that there were at least 27 distinct human species besides the winners (us, for now) was news to me. I was reminded that after my formal education ended (decades ago), there have been countless discoveries about countless facts. Thanks to Chip Walter, I not only learned some paleoanthropology tidbits, I became more aware of how little I (and my fellow members of the presently existing hominin species) know about anything. What fun it is to learn something new. There may come a time when this version of past events is revised to account for new facts discovered in the future.

Why we're different, fundamentally different, from every other species on the planet and how that probably came about. Lots of things to think about. Intelligence is good, we all agree, but high intelligence requires a big brain, and that comes at a price. As Walter shows, the triumph of brains over other factors, like speed, strength, and reproductive cycle time, was not a sure thing. If the book has a shortcoming, it might be that Walter only compares homo sapiens to our closest cousins. If one broadens the analysis to include bacteria and viruses, the question of most successful species on the planet, and which will be the last one standing, becomes considerably more interesting. Still, a concise, quick, and interesting read.

I learned more from this one book than I have in the last few years of reading science literature. This book comes at a time when paleo-anthropology is making huge strides and I was mostly unaware of

these findings, or at least how they were being put together. Not only that, but there are major insights into our evolution and behavior that applies to us today. The development of our brain and child rearing are strongly featured here and with good reason. A book to make you think about where we came from and where we might be going. What would the next hominid species look like? Will we recognize it when it happens? A wonderful read.

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