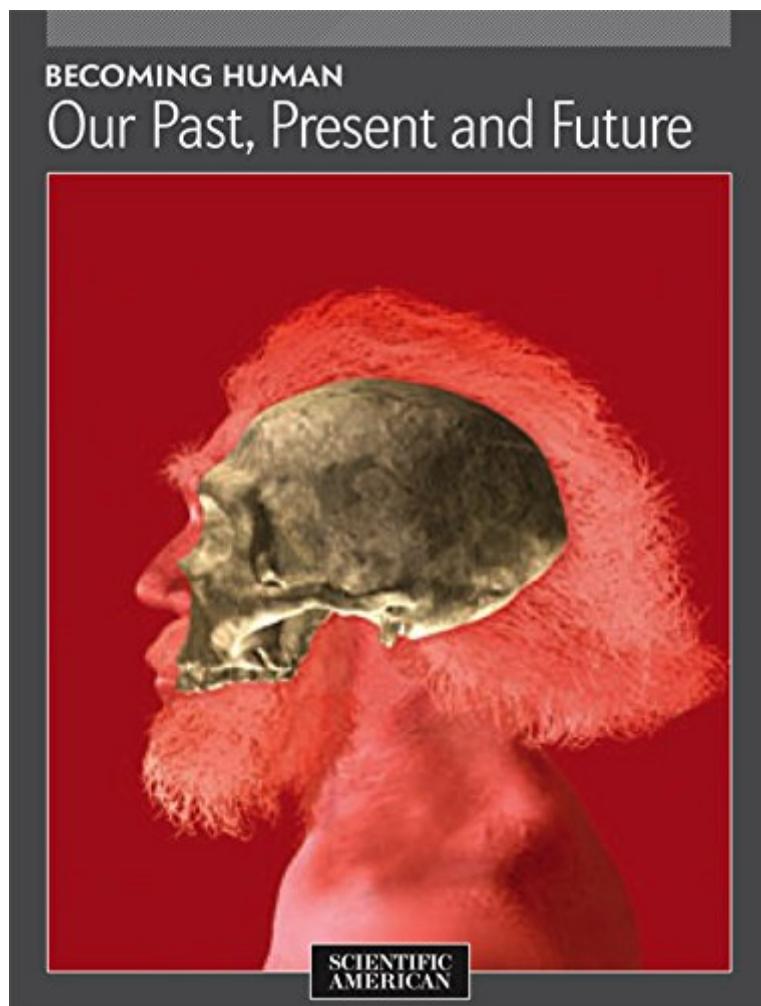


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Becoming Human: Our Past, Present And Future



Synopsis

Becoming Human: Our Past, Present and Future by the Editors of Scientific American

We humans are a strange bunch. We have self-awareness and yet often act on impulses that remain hidden. We were forged in adversity but live in a world of plenty. How did we get here? What is to become of us? To these age-old questions, science has in recent years brought powerful tools and reams of data, and in this eBook, *Becoming Human: Our Past, Present and Future*, we look at what these data have to tell us about who we are. We know, for instance, that three million years ago, a group of primates known as the australopithecines was walking capably on two legs—“the better to navigate the African savanna”—and yet still had long arms suited to life in the trees. In Section One, “*Becoming Us*,” we search for how and why this and other transitions occurred. In “*Lucy’s Baby*,” author Kate Wong discusses what the oldest juvenile skeleton tells us about how early humans walked the Earth. Another article, “*The Naked Truth*,” examines why humans lost their hair and how hairlessness was a key factor in developing other human traits. Section Two covers “*The Secrets of our Success*,” and we see that human evolution and culture are often related. In “*The Evolution of Grandparents*,” Rachel Caspari shows us that as humans started to live longer, grandparents played a role in family life, which in turn made possible more complex social behaviors. In Section Three, “*Migration and Colonization*,” we look at how scientists are studying the minuscule bits of DNA that differ from one individual to another for clues to our origins and settlements. “*The First Americans*” illustrates the findings that have pushed back the date at which hunter-gatherers colonized the Americas. And in Section Four, “*Vanished Humans*,” the discovery of “hobbits”—a human species of small stature—“has turned the science of human origins on its ear. Where is evolution taking us? We present two points of view in Section Five, “*Our Continuing Evolution*.” In “*How We Are Evolving*,” Jonathan K. Pritchard argues that selection pressure typically acts over tens of thousands of years, which means we probably won’t evolve much anytime soon. But stasis is only one possible future, says Peter Ward in “*What May Become of Us*.” In adapting to new environments—“say, a colony on Mars”—our human species may eventually diverge into two or more. Or we could go the cyborg route and merge with machines. Whichever option you prefer, there is plenty to ponder.

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Customer Reviews

This is a grab bag of current research across a wide range of topics by scientists who are doing the actual research. Many articles I found gripping, some of less interest or too technical. Articles review human origins up to lastest finds such as "Selam" 3.3MY infant from Dikika, Ethiopia (still only partly excavated). The focus moves from Tanzania to South Africa for early H.sapiens history. The focus also moves from fossil evidence to the human genome studies. An example - one 118 base section shows just two changes from chicken to chimpanzee, but 18 changes from chimp to H sapiens, This section deals with structure of the human cortex, linking to the "great leap forward" (Diamond) in H. sapiens. It raises a doubt about Meyer's well presented "Darwin's Doubt" challenging species evolution. Small gene changes can have dramatic results. A detailed treatment of the First Americans not so interesting for an Australian, but the mystery of "The Hobbits" is. Marean writes of a human bottleneck at MIS6 with survivors just a few in South Africa. Was he meaning MIS 4 following the intense cold around 70 000 yrs and the Toba Eruption? Overall this was an excellent read.

Scientific American has had many good articles over the years on the continuing progress in teasing out our origins. This collection comprises some of the best. One thing paleontologists have learned over the last century is that the hominid family tree is much messier than it seemed at first -- and

that messiness makes for stimulating reading.

There was nothing less than fantastic about this book with the reference points of collaboration from paleontologist and paleoanthropologist around the world. *Becoming Human* is a must read taking the reader from the developing stages of our ancestral beginnings through evolutionary development and how each step can be defined through modern day technology. MIS6 and our near extinction opened my eyes to what we have become and what humanity has endured. If you read one book a year make sure this is your first choice.

This book contains a series of articles that appeared in print and online on *Scientific American* website, primarily between 2012 to present. Most of the articles are written by specialists in the field, including some by leading researchers and Nobel Prize winners. Overall the book makes for excellent reading and makes cutting edge research intelligible to the ordinary man. Reasonably priced and definitely well worth a read.

I found it fascinating. I do not agree with everything this book says, but I was impressed with all new discoveries since "Lucy" was uncovered in Olduvai Gorge. The picture of our past has changed drastically in recent decades. I am still trying to get my head around all of it.

A clutch of important articles summarizing the current state of knowledge in Physical Anthropology, Evolution and genetics, as applied to the emergence of modern man.

This eBook is attributed to Christopher Seddon as author, although he acknowledges significant input from five colleagues. I found it to be a very illuminating and useful overview of the present state of knowledge regarding what has been uncovered and evaluated in connection with our evolutionary path from our common ancestor with the chimps and gorillas. A pleasant and interesting read.

Although I am a rank amateur I have been following human and biological evolution for decades. While I have other sources, the ability to pull this out of my hip pocket anytime I have some dead time is nearly miraculous. I only wish I had more control over the images.

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