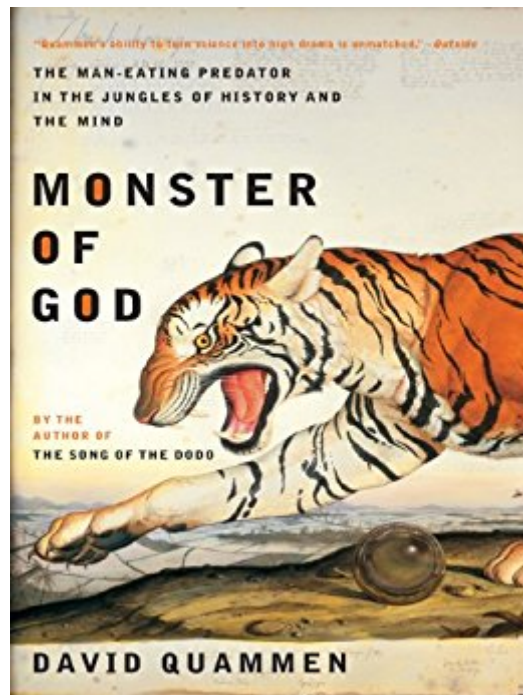


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Monster Of God: The Man-Eating Predator In The Jungles Of History And The Mind



Synopsis

"Rich detail and vivid anecdotes of adventure....A treasure trove of exotic fact and hard thinking." —The New York Times Book Review, front page

For millennia, lions, tigers, and their man-eating kin have kept our dark, scary forests dark and scary, and their predatory majesty has been the stuff of folklore. But by the year 2150 big predators may only exist on the other side of glass barriers and chain-link fences. Their gradual disappearance is changing the very nature of our existence. We no longer occupy an intermediate position on the food chain; instead we survey it invulnerably from above—so far above that we are in danger of forgetting that we even belong to an ecosystem. Casting his expert eye over the rapidly diminishing areas of wilderness where predators still reign, the award-winning author of *The Song of the Dodo* examines the fate of lions in India's Gir forest, of saltwater crocodiles in northern Australia, of brown bears in the mountains of Romania, and of Siberian tigers in the Russian Far East. In the poignant and troublesome ferocity of these embattled creatures, we recognize something primeval deep within us, something in danger of vanishing forever.

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Customer Reviews

I really enjoyed this exceptional book on the mythology, culture, history, and biology of man-eaters around the world. Though he primarily focuses on four specific animals - the Asiatic lion in the forest of Gir in India, the saltwater crocodile in northern Australia, the brown bear in the forests and mountains of Romania, and the Siberian (or more properly Amur) tiger of the Russian Far East - author David Quammen discusses other predators as well, such as the African lion, the grizzly of North America, the Nile crocodile, and the leopard as well as some now extinct species. Quammen does an excellent job of covering just about any aspect you might wish to learn about animals that occasionally dine on man. Aspects of ecology are very well covered, introducing the reader to many key concepts in ecology (particularly as they relate to these creatures), such as the terms alpha predator, keystone species, and trophic cascades, showing that for a healthy ecosystem - including healthy plants and prey animals - the presence of a viable population of predator is crucial. The education this book gave me on ecology was quite remarkable, with the author going into very readable detail on many issues and very interestingly their history as well, showing some of the personalities behind their conception. The individual biology and paleontology of each of the focus species in this book are well covered, as well as that of close and more distant relations, covering everything from the rise and fall of sabertooth mammals (feline and otherwise) to the spread of the tiger species throughout Asia (and its later evolution into various subspecies).

. . . and meet politics and globalisation. The encounter, reported by North America's foremost nature journalist, is an informative, exquisite read. Quammen's value in explaining Nature's realm is demonstrated by his many excellent works. This one achieves a new level of excellence as he travels the planet seeking that which we fear most - predators. Not just any predators, but what he terms the "alpha predators" - large, solitary and figures of fearful legend. Legends play a large role in how we view the rest of Nature. No matter how strenuously we try to separate ourselves from our environment, Quammen argues, it will return to confront us. Quammen focuses on four predators in this account - the Asian lion, the crocodile, bears in Romania and "Siberian" tigers. Surrounded by humans and their legends and lifestyles, this quartette symbolises our conflicting views of animals with reputations as "man-eaters". Disdaining accusations of "sexist" or other cultural labels surrounding his terms, Quammen confronts us with the realities of human-predator interactions. Lions, which once roamed from Atlantic Europe to Eastern Asia, have been pushed into meagre enclaves outside of Africa. They, along with the crocodiles, bears and Amur tigers are surrounded by human neighbours. Quammen explains that the long-term human residents, the Mahldari in India, Aborigines of Australia, the Romanian shepherds and Ugede of Eastern Russia have formed

accommodating relationships with their proximate predator populations. The oft-repeated phrase is "don't bother them and they won't bother you". Changes in political and economic forces, Quammen contends, bring changes to those relationships.

I've read most of Quammen's books, and I strongly recommend reading "Song of the Dodo" before this one. That is Quammen's best, and one of the greatest popular science books ever written, a thrilling, enlightening classic. This one is just ok. This one has potential: exploring the habitats of "man-eating" predators, the mythology surrounding them, their place in human psychology, the struggle to preserve them and the questions in that struggle. It could be a fascinating book, and it is pretty darn good. Quammen looks at the Asiatic Lion, which plays a prominent role in the Bible and the rest of ancient European and Near-Eastern culture. But today it only remains in a small and shrinking forest in western India. Quammen goes there and reports on the lifestyles of the people who live in and around that forest, and the chances for the lion's survival. Then he moves to the saltwater crocodile, especially in Australia. Here he does a good job exploring the economic significance of the crocodile and the leather industry, and also on the relations of various aboriginal groups to the crocodile. He does not tell us much about the Australian government's role in conservation, although that must be significant as well. Next he turns to the grizzlies of Romania, called brown bears everywhere outside of North America. He gives a decent history of their popularity in Yellowstone and Glacier parks, and a great coverage of their place in Romanian forest management, sport hunting, and shepherding. Of course Ceausescu forms the constant background to the story of the bears in Romania. Finally he goes to the Russian Far East, around Vladivostok, to learn about the situation of the Siberian Tiger. (Not the white-tiger mutants in zoos.

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